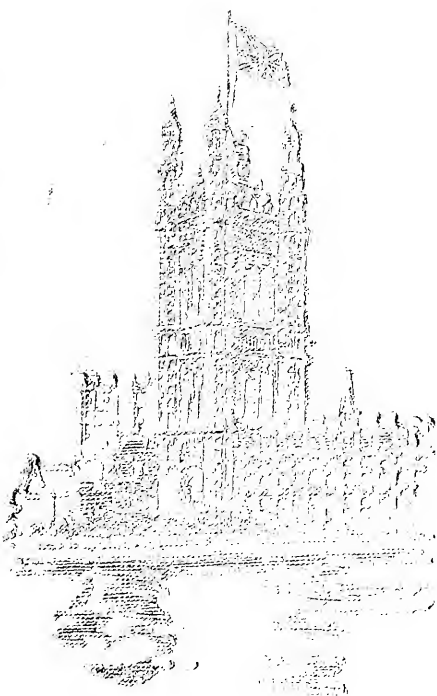


THE HOUSE  
OF COMMONS

Sir Richard Temple, Bart,



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LOS ANGELES







THE HOUSE OF COMMONS



# The

By

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G.C.S.I.

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## Preface

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THE Chapters of this little work relate to the House of Commons in the present time. The book is intended to serve as a short and easy manual for those who may desire to acquire a fundamental though elementary idea of our representative institution as it is in all its vivid reality and in its overwhelming importance,—but who may not be able to attend and hear the Debates or have not been personally conducted round the House by their members. As stated in the introductory Chapter, my account is derived from the experience of a

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decade, 1885 to 1895, which was indeed eventful. Still no attempt is made to recount the parliamentary history of that decade, although it comprised both of the attempts made by Mr. Gladstone to pass through Parliament Bills for Home Rule in Ireland, the consequent break-up of the old Liberal party,—the alliance between one wing of that party as Liberal Unionists with the Conservatives,—the formation of a new Party under the name of Gladstonians,—the permanent measure for the repression of political outrages in Ireland,—the desperate resistance to that arrangement offered by the Irish Nationalist party returned to the House in potent strength by the Election of 1885 under Mr. Parnell,—the apparent confusion of that Party after his retirement and death,—the constitution of a strong Conservative Party Administration with

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the support, but without the junction, of the Liberal Unionists, for one long Parliament,— the subsequent accession of the Gladstonians to power for a short Parliament,—and then the formation of a Conservative Administration, this time with the practical junction of the Liberal Unionists, so that the combined Party in power since 1895 has borne the name of Unionist,—the policy pursued by Parliament through all these changes being fraught with momentous results both at home and abroad. These many points of contemporary history must be of much interest to countless persons still living. But they could hardly be set forth by anyone who, like myself, had been an actor in the events, without some bias, or some partiality, real or supposed, towards one or other of the two opposing sides. My object has been to indicate the ways of the House

## *Preface*

of Commons as they would appear to any observer, whether he happened to belong to one side or to the other of politics—to pourtray things relating to the House at large, without reference to the organization of any one Party in particular or to any sectional division. But, if such organizations and divisions are mentioned at all, they are alluded to all alike in reference to their several Parties. In this manner an aspect of impartiality is, I hope, tolerably well preserved. So the points brought forward are such as no Member would object to, be he Conservative or Liberal ; nor yet would he claim any one of them as exclusively pertaining to his own Party.

With this general intention the work is divided into Nine Chapters. The first is introductory, setting forth the qualities, the abilities, the capacities, of the House elected in the General Election of 1885,

## *Preface*

and in each of the subsequent Elections. The estimates regarding this subject, which is the most practically important of all subjects to the British people, are made with much care and some detail. If they be approximately correct, then they show how greatly the merits preponderate over the demerits. Thus the nation may be proud and thankful that on the whole such able bodies of men as these are chosen from time to time by the Electors at large.

The Second Chapter discusses the question which is commonly mooted as to whether the House can truly be called a Club for its Members. The material advantages, such as buildings, apartments, accommodation, means of intellectual recreation, are described, wherein the House may be compared with the best clubs in London. But also the social aspects are alluded to, such

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as the comradeship in some ways, which is a merit, the want of homogeneity in other ways, the class differences, in themselves quite unavoidable, which are defects, from the point of view which a good Club would entertain. Indeed these defects are such that a conclusion is arrived at to the effect that the House cannot properly be called a Club. On the other hand, there is claimed for the House, the character of a public school in which adults are disciplined, of an arena in which political gladiators are exercised, of a theatre where parliamentarians walk the stage with the nation as audience.

The Third Chapter relates to the precincts and buildings of the House; Westminster Hall, a standing epitome of the history of England for eight hundred years, the nobly beautiful St. Stephen's Hall, before the Reformation the Chapel

## *Preface*

Royal of the Palace of Westminster, since the Reformation the home of the Commons till the conflagration of 1834,—the cloisters of St. Stephen's, now the cloakroom,—the wondrously ornate chapel commonly called the crypt,—then the Central Hall, the frescoed corridor and the outer Lobby of the Commons,—the Chamber itself every inch of it replete with associations, but apparently small in comparison with the mighty parts played within it,—the five-chambered Library well filled and equipped, most picturesque and commodious,—the famous terrace, with its tea parties in summer, and its views of river, of bridges, and of metropolitan structures,—the chain of Committee Rooms in the upper storey, and the long perspective of corridors thronged with eager men of business,—the multiform associations, national, personal, historical, contemporary, clustering round this political beehive.

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The Fourth Chapter comprises life in Parliament, as it is led by the several classes of Members, the Parliamentary—purely and entirely—who has no occupation or avocations besides those concerning the House,—the man of commercial business,—the man of the learned professions,—the man of society,—all of whom perform the same duty on important occasions but on all other occasions take different shares in the work of the House, varying according to the time they can afford to give—or are inclined to devote. Then follows some analysis of the business which falls to the parliamentary who gives his whole self to the House from the forenoon to the small hours of the morning. Some light is thrown on the truth regarding obstruction, a subject which is misrepresented, no doubt unintentionally, by each opposing Party in turn, but which, if kept in its due limits, is a legitimate weapon



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of warfare. Some account is offered of the nature and the conditions of parliamentary success in its various phases.

The Fifth Chapter refers to the manners and customs of the House,—the rules of closure increasing in stringency,—the regulation which ordinarily stops the regular business of the House at midnight,—the Questions or daily interpellations to Ministers whereby the Private Members do really and justly constitute themselves the Grand Inquest of the nation,—the growing abridgement of the old opportunities of Private Members in respect to legislation,—their unabated privileges regarding the ancient maxim of grievances before Supply,—the etiquette puzzling to new Members,—the power and authority of the Speaker, the significance of the term Whip, which first is applied to an official, and secondly to a circular notice.

The Sixth Chapter depicts briefly some

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of the scenes which I witnessed in the House, and it would be of no use to attempt the description of any others, that is, before or since my time. It is premised that the usual aspect of the House is one of dignity and repose. At Question time, however, when interpellations are addressed by Private Members to Ministers, there is often a breeziness ruffling the surface of the waters. Next the peculiar expressiveness given to the cheering is explained, according to the tones of its various moods. Some word-painting is used in reference to the Division of 1886 when the first Home Rule Bill was defeated,—to the first application, in regard to the Irish Crimes Bill, of the stringent method of closure subsequently known by the name of Guillotine,—the all-night sitting on Supply shortly before the Easter of 1887,—the grave affair nearly approaching to violence during the Committee stage on the second Home

## *Preface*

Rule Bill,—the several fine episodes arising out of Mr. Gladstone's eloquence.

In the Seventh Chapter some of the leading figures of Parliament are noticed as they were in my decade. First of all Mr. Gladstone as he loomed before us, in the closing events of his vast career, with an earnestness and potency marvellous for his advanced age,—then Lord Randolph Churchill with his meteoric career prematurely cut short by his own act,—the equally sudden ascent of Mr. Arthur Balfour from an unprecedented success in Ireland to the leadership of the House by general acclamation,—Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, if not aiming at oratory, yet the best speaker of his day and a potential factor in politics,—Sir William Harcourt, incisive in assault, a master of humorous invective and on the whole a great Minister,—and William Henry Smith, a leader of proved

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success, and an embodiment of the genius of common sense.

The Eighth Chapter presents a summary of the proceedings of the Irish Nationalist Party inside the House since 1885,—the adaptation by them of every word, gesture, vote, proceeding, combination, towards one object, namely the obtaining Home Rule for Ireland. Then the characteristics of their leaders, at that time, are touched upon,—the elaborate expositions by Mr. Sexton, the fierce outbursts of Mr. Timothy Healy, the influential utterances of Mr. T. P. O'Connor, the power of speech pertaining to Mr. John Redmond, the mellifluous oratory of Mr. Justin Macarthy, and lastly the weird, even mysterious attitude of Mr. Parnell, in some respects incomprehensible, in others but too painfully clear to every Briton endowed with patriotic insight,—the temporary division of the

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Nationalists into Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites after his retirement and death.

The Ninth Chapter refers to the Lords as seen from the Commons. It were out of place for a Commoner to essay anything like a description of the House of Lords—still the Commons do enjoy many advantages for observing their Lordships' House in part at least. Some comparison is made between the Chamber of the Upper House and that of the Lower, the differences being precisely adopted to the work of each of the two Houses respectively. Allusion is made to the Commoners standing at the Bar of the Lords to hear the debates,—to the Privy Councillors standing or sitting on the steps at the foot of the throne,—to the strange spectacle afforded by the Commons crushing at the Bar of the Lords, through no fault of their own, when summoned to hear the Queen's Speeches

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read on various occasions,—the self-imposed restraint of the hereditary legislators in contrast with the discipline enforced by rules made by the popularly elected legislators in order to restrain the ardour or the momentary excesses on the part of any of their Members individually.

R. T.

*October* 1899

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# THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I AM about to present a brief and popular description of the House of Commons as it has been during recent years and is likely to be in the immediate future.

Before doing so, however, it may be well for me to remind my readers of the claim I have to attempt such a task as this. In other words what is my practical and personal knowledge of the House of Commons? Well: I was there for ten years, that is from 1885 to 1895. During that decade, excepting autumnal intervals of travel, I gave my whole time and thoughts to Parliament. I attended almost every sitting from its beginning to its end. I saw everything

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and heard everything, almost without exception. I was present in almost every division. In round numbers I have voted in nearly three thousand divisions. I always heard the Question put by the Speaker before we proceeded to divide upon it, and in every instance I had my own notion regarding its merits. If in any cases I was not present in a division—it was not one in a hundred—the cause was either casual illness, or attendance on obligatory duty in the School Board for London of which I was the Financial Member. Nor did the work end here, I took my full, perhaps even more than a full share, in that Committee work, which is one of the heaviest burdens which a parliamentarian has to bear. I served on several Select Committees whose proceedings were protracted over many weeks—of one of these, a peculiarly laborious one, I was Chairman. I was more than once Chairman of Private Bill Committees, for the trial of lengthy and complicated cases in which the leaders of the Parliamentary Bar were practising on both

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sides. I was always a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, and for two busy years I was its Chairman—all which necessarily afforded me a complete insight into Parliamentary Finance. I was always a Member of one of the Grand Committees to which the House had delegated the work of the Committee stage for Bills which were referred to it, and these were many. Moreover my decade was as arduous and troublesome a one as was ever passed by the House of Commons. It comprised the fiercest, the most persistently waged, the most long-drawn-out contests of our generation—all most suggestive and instructive to a student, like me, of parliamentary affairs. As a consequence—among many other consequences—of this, was the protraction and extension of the regular sessions and a frequency of autumn sessions, so that during my decade the average time annually given to the sittings and to the business of the House must have been considerably greater than in previous decades.

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I am thus entitled and able to speak confidently regarding the realities of the House of Commons. My decade embraced three Parliaments and three General Elections. Thrice I saw a new House assembled and an old House dissolved. Four times I took my individual part in the election of a new Speaker. What I have to say, however, must be from my own point of view and from that only. My view is that of a Private Member taking an active and constant part in the parliamentary work. After all that is the view which is most interesting to those who wish to know the Commons as they are. I never was in Office, and consequently never sat on the Front Bench. My seat on the green benches was immediately behind it. Any description of things as they would appear from the Front Bench: must necessarily trench on official statesmanship which, though connected with, is not comprised, in the scope of these articles. I was and am a Conservative, but the fact of my belonging to a Party—which is unavoidable under the condi-

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tions of parliamentary life—will not affect the impartiality and trustworthiness of my account, because the topics do not relate to policy or to the principles of Party but to the practice of Parliament. They relate to customs and habits common to all parties, and followed equally whichever Party may happen to be in power. Certainly it was my ambition, even before entering on an arduous career in the East, to sit some day in the House of Commons. Besides taking my share, as a unit, in the labours and responsibilities of a great nation, I wanted to witness and to learn all that may be seen and learnt inside the walls of the Commons. Having got there with all the usual difficulty, I was very anxious to stay there for at least several years and several Parliaments. Having been permitted to do this I quitted the House in satisfaction and contentment, quite voluntarily ; giving up a safe seat and leaving a fine majority behind me in my constituency. Thus, although my account will not, I hope, be unduly tinged with optimism, it will necessarily be cheerful,

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relating to a retrospect which makes me feel thankful for all that I was able to do and to learn, and well rewarded for all the toil and the sacrifices I had to endure on this account.

My conclusion is—subject to correction by those who think otherwise—that there is nothing in the British Empire better worth knowing for a Briton, than the House of Commons at Westminster. Such knowledge is the summary, almost the sum total of very many branches of human study. It contains the acquirements necessary for self-discipline and self-command. It requires the observation of many essential parts of human nature. No doubt the House of Commons is frequently disparaged now-a-days, quite unduly. That is to say, its salient superficial faults are derided, while its solid, deep-lying merits are but too often forgotten. With all respect to the public, I submit that it must ever be a bootless as well as an unthankful proceeding for any part of the British people to deride or disparage the Commons of Britain. For the House of

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Commons is just what the people choose to make it. If the popular voice objects to certain things in the conduct of the House, they will be gradually overcome. Particularly if constituencies by its own warnings depreciates certain things in the conduct of its representative body, they will speedily disappear. Indeed, I shall have hereafter to shew that some faults, popularly attributed to the Members at large, are really due to the action and influence of certain constituencies or of certain sections in the constituencies generally. If ever we denounce the House of Commons, we are really denouncing ourselves. Such denunciation would really be a confession of national faults and shortcomings, though possibly not so intended by those who make use of it. To say that the House of Commons is without fault would be as much as to say that the British nation is faultless, which would be absurd. British citizens and electors may be assured that—after every drawback and deduction for defects and shortcomings, their House of Commons really is

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good, thoroughly trustworthy, sincerely anxious to do its duty in all respects and all round, to those whom it represents. Considering the extreme importance of the subject to all our patriotic interests, it is needful for the electors at large not only to read the parliamentary debates—which is done either in summary or in detail with some regularity—but also to ascertain the time-honoured rules of the House, and the conditions under which they are applied; the methods by which the Members have to work, the ways in which they bring the influence and weight of their constituents to bear upon the deliberations and the decisions of the Assembly. The more closely is this enquiry made, the nearer is this insight gained, the more clearly will the merits of the Assembly appear, in its debates, its divisions, its enquiries in the various committees. Furthermore, large changes have in my time come about in the system of the House, gradually or quickly, for better or for worse. Still the House is the safe depository of the interests of the Empire,



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as regarding all evils and abuses, it is still, as it ever has been, the Grand Inquest of the Nation.

When in 1884 the Franchise was given to the labourers in the country as it had been already accorded to the artisans in the towns—and when the constituencies were subdivided in view of a redistribution of seats throughout the country, in order, too, that the electors in every locality might make their wishes more immediately and directly felt—when, further, the access to Parliament was greatly cheapened for candidates, the maximum expense being everywhere fixed by law—it was often predicted that there would be a marked deterioration in the quality of the Members and in the personnel of the House. It was apprehended that under the new system humbler men than before would become candidates, and that the choice of the electors would fall on such men generally in preference to others, in as much as the purely democratic element would prevail in every constituency. Now has this apprehension been in any degree justified by the result? There

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can be no doubt whatever as to the answer to such a question, inasmuch as five General Elections have taken place, five times has the House of Commons been composed and re-composed under this system since 1884. The proportion of humble men in respect to resources and social status has certainly increased in the House, and that is not at all regrettable, inasmuch as personal representation of certain important classes has been secured. One disturbing element, namely that of the Irish Nationalists has been fully doubled; that may or may not be regrettable according to the view which may be taken, but which is not to be discussed here; it is, however, deeply regretted by many British people. Nevertheless, let the composition of the House be taken on a whole; let the names of the Members be looked at one by one in any Parliamentary guide book, that by Dodd, or by Vacher, or other. Then it will be found that the composition of the House has not deteriorated in comparison with its predecessors elected before 1884. On the contrary,

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it will be seen to have actually improved, as being more representative than ever of the intellect, the learning, the science, the imperial experience, the business-like capacity of the nation. There may in former days have been what was called "a landlords' parliament." No such thing would be possible now-a-days; but the landowning interest, the country gentlemen's party, the agricultural knowledge, are largely, indeed fully, represented. The legal profession, always of great consequence in a complex civilization like ours, deserves full representation, which indeed it receives in more than a full measure, the reason being that the government has very often, perhaps even generally, selected men from the Commons for judicial status and preferment; consequently most of the justly ambitious barristers seek to enter the House. The Railway interest is of recognized importance, it is so fully represented in the House that complaints have, perhaps erroneously, declared it to possess over-representation. Consider the great business classes ;

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the heads of firms, of enterprises, of industries, of banks, in every great centre of the kingdom, not only in the city of London, but everywhere at home and abroad; and it will be seen that each and all of them have Members in the House. The cheapening of electoral expenses by law, securing on the one hand a reasonable chance for every man of moderate competency, on the other hand precluding an open door for men of no means of their own, or men for whom no means would be subscribed—has had one distinctly beneficial effect. It has enabled retired Governors from India and the Colonies, Army and Navy men, administrators of many kinds who had served the empire beyond the seas, men of science, of historic lore, of literary renown, to enter the Commons. This has placed at the disposal of the House a mass of unrivalled knowledge—only to be gained in danger, and in the very stress of affairs—regarding the concerns of a world-wide Empire, and that, too, in days when expansion in all directions is confronting us with momentous

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problems, wherein the great powers of Europe are concerned. This, too, has imbued the House with much of the highest and most varied culture of the age. Happily the Universities of England, Scotland, and Ireland, are still represented in the House, and so maintain the influence of trained intellect in the Councils of the nation. Thus let any enquirer take name by name alphabetically in the list of any House of Commons elected since 1884—that is under the new system—then he will perceive the muster roll of men eminent in science, in literature, in travel, in research, in imperial knowledge of every country in the British Empire or within the British sphere of influence. He will realize the vastness and variety of information thus comprised in the representation of the people, and this knowledge he would find reflected in the debates, if he fully listened to them. He will also notice very many names already celebrated in contemporary annals, and probably destined to become historic. Further, he will observe how many noble and aristocratic

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names are there, how many scions of the ancient county families—showing how many democratic constituencies prefer candidates whose antecedents are illustrious or whose families are popularly known. In my time it used to be said that there was no subject (save theology) under the sun, no branch of human knowledge in which we could not find some Member or other who would make a speech of authority. In all these respects a comparison may be challenged between the Houses elected since 1884, and those elected before that time. I am sure that in catholic comprehensiveness the later Houses are wholly superior to the former—as indeed they ought to be.\*

\* I have some confidence in recalling my memories, because I kept a full Journal of all I saw and heard in the House. The record was written up daily, and there are ten large volumes of these Journals for my ten years.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AS A CLUB

AFTER the Introduction presented on the pre-going Chapter I enter upon a description in general terms of the House of Commons, and more particularly of the life led in it by the members of various sorts and conditions.

A question immediately rises to the surface as to whether the House is or is not a Club for its Members. In some respects it will indeed be found such; but in other respects not. On the whole it will hardly be so considered. The question, however, well merits some examination.

The phrase that "the House is the best club in London" was at one time a proverb. This must have been in times intervening between the first Reform Act early in the thirties and

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the second one late in the sixties; when sometimes "a landlord's parliament" was elected and when, owing to many causes, there was little of popular election in the constituencies except in a few at the great centres of industry and population. The proverb must have lost some of its truth after the sixties, when Members were returned by household suffrage for the Boroughs: and still more after the last Reform Bill midway in the eighties, when county Members came largely to be returned by the rural labourers. By the last named reform, too, the numbers of the Irish Party—already large enough to make a stir—were fully doubled. This particular Party then became big enough to make itself felt not only in the political conduct, but also in the social habits of the House. It would be erroneous then to call the House the best Club in London at any time since 1885, or even a good Club. The only possible question would be whether the House can properly be called a Club at all. As this question is one of some interest I will briefly discuss it.



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The points in favour of a Club theory would be as follows.

There are buildings and apartments, halls and terraces for sitting, smoking, reading, lunching, dining, pacing to and fro for recreation. There are also apartments for the reception of guests, ladies as well as gentlemen, and every reasonable facility is afforded to Members for showing their constituents or their friends over the whole House and its precincts at certain hours. Now all these advantages are daily made use of by all the Members in common, to whatever Party or to whatever class of society each one of them may belong. Some of these advantages too are very considerable. The Library is truly a noble place, extensive, well stocked, commodious and picturesque—most convenient and suitable in every way—not to be surpassed, probably not to be equalled by any Club in London. The same may be said of the Terrace which will be described more fully in a future article. Enough here to say, that it is quite admirable, and that no Club in London has anything that

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could in the least be compared with it. The smoking rooms are on a par with those of London Clubs. The dining rooms are fairly good, but inferior to those of the best London Clubs, and not so good as they ought to be, considering the importance (as will be explained hereafter) of inducing as many Members as possible to stay in the House for dinner. The tea-room, though interesting, is very inferior in regard to its place. The same objection may be applied to the newspaper-room adjoining. The halls, the corridors, the lobbies, are capital lounging places. In them there is abundant facility for Members to hold interviews with their friends and constituents. If any special consultation be required, there are Conference rooms provided. In these latter respects the House is superior to any Club in London.

The sum total of these advantages and facilities would shew the House to be in many material matters a Club of high rank. On the whole any Member of any class may if so minded spend his day happily and profitably in

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the House. He may enjoy the sight of noble and historic things, may get fresh air and exercise on the Terrace, may study the newspapers both of town and country, may write magazine articles, may even proceed with the composition of a book in the Library, works of reference being all around him on the shelves.

It were superfluous however to remark that the qualities of a Club are not only material and intellectual but also moral and social. And it is here that discrimination is needed to determine whether the House can properly be styled a Club.

If we consider the constitution of the good Clubs in London, we readily see that in every one of them there is a certain homogeneity among the Members. In some, like the Naval and Military, the Civil Service, the Scientific and University Clubs, the Members belong absolutely to the same class with the same thoughts and pursuits. In some political Clubs, as for example the Carlton, the Members not only have the same thoughts but also belong to

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nearly the same society; at all events within the Club walls there is not much distinction between noble and gentle, between titled and untitled. In the Travellers' Club again, the rule that every candidate must have travelled to a specified extent, creates a certain bond between all the Members. The Athenæum indeed contains a great variety of elements—intellectual, ecclesiastic, judicial, political, artistic, scientific, social—still there is a certain tone and atmosphere pervading the whole. It were needless to carry the comparison further; but in all probability an instance of a really mixed Club with Members of widely different ideas, bringing up, and social classes, could hardly be found in London. Such a case is very possibly unknown to any organization under private or corporate management.

Yet the House of Commons is a mixed Club exactly of this description; if it be a Club at all. Most judges, indeed, would say, after defining a Club in the ordinary acceptation, would probably decide that it is not a Club in reality.

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No doubt there is much of comradeship among all Members of the House without any distinction. The fact of having gone through the same electioneering trials, being beset with the same anxieties in their respective constituencies, does constitute a very perceptible bond between them. Political animosity seldom goes very far, it rarely interrupts private friendship, it never interferes with acquaintanceship. Political convenience in reference to measures before the House may cause Members of social rank to converse much with Labour Members. Men who had just been raging furiously against each other from the green benches inside the House, may be seen dining together, or smoking together on the Terrace. Now and again there will be a Member so dreaded or so distrusted, or for some special reason so disliked that no other Member will acknowledge or speak to him. But I can call to mind very few such instances. As a rule Members widely differing in rank, surroundings, pursuits, ideas, principles, do converse with tolerable freedom according as

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opportunity may offer or require inside the precincts of the House,—even though they may not do so outside. Membership of the House does practically serve as a medium of introduction at least inside the House. Moreover the system of “pairing”—an unwritten system, practically operative though not recognised by the rules of the House—does lead to much intercommunication between Members of opposite Parties. I know nothing personally of pairing—being always present I never paired—but I could daily witness its effect. A Tory and a Radical may be at daggers drawn. But the one wants to go to Germany and the other to Scotland; so they bury their differences and pair!

Notwithstanding all this, there is not and cannot be that understanding between the Members of the House as a body which consists between the Members of a good London Club. The Conservatives may be brethren in arms on their benches, may become fast friends in the Conference Rooms, may form or cement friend-

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ships that last throughout life. The Liberals may do just the same. But it will be groups that are thus formed, and groups they will remain. No such distinctive groups would be found in a good London Club. Inside such a Club if men are conversing they feel they are in the midst of friends. There is no such confidence among Members of the House. Members, talking in the Lobbies or at tea or at the dinner table, on politics or public affairs, must look round to see who may be within earshot, whether any secret may escape, whether an opponent may be on the watch. Again one may converse with another Member, personally unknown, on general topics—but one must not mention any political or parliamentary topic—nor even allude to any parliamentary personage for fear of unintentionally giving offence. One must know or divine what Party he belongs to, even if one does not like to ask his name, before venturing on any save the most ordinary conversation. His name however can easily be learnt by turning the conversation on to his

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constituency; once that is known the name of the Member can be learnt from any of the reference books. Or, let the familiar case of the dinner table be considered. In a real Club anyone may take any place that may be vacant in the dining-room, undeterred by those who may be sitting near. But a Member would hardly do that in the dining-room of the Commons. He must, when choosing a place, think of those who are or may probably come and sit near him. Out of the several rooms there used to be one where the Irish Nationalist Members dined. A Conservative would not care to dine there; for that would be unsociable for him, and embarrassing to them. In the same way the Radicals dined usually in a certain quarter; the company of a Tory would not be acceptable there. In another room there was a table by courtesy and practice allotted to Cabinet Ministers; a table also assigned similarly to the other Members of the existing Ministry: these were in a sense high tables or chief places; and no such arrangement



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would be possible in a real Club. Again there were certain quarters where the out-and-out supporters of the Ministry would dine. One of their opponents could not conveniently dine with them in the brief interval between two parts of the debate, as the conversation would be sure to fall on what had just been happening in the Chamber where they had been playing opposite parts. There was a table where Liberal Unionists used to dine; a Conservative would certainly sit down with them, but hardly a Gladstonian.

Thus the House, though comprising many elements of Club life, is not technically or really a Club—though it may be so called in a special sense. No: it is, for social life among the Members, much more than a Club. It is an arena, in the truest sense, where a man has to be in the company, not only of those who agree with him, but of those who differ from him; where he finds his own level, however highly he may have heretofore held his head, where he has to smooth away all

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angularities of temper and of demeanour, where he finds his notions of other people's opinions and principles modified (generally for the better) by personal discussion, where he gets to know countless things not to be learnt anywhere else, where a common membership gives a stamp of equality to all, within the broad limits of the House, whatever be their status in other spheres outside, where the sense of inequality is less than anywhere else in the kingdom, and where even the best or highest is not more than *primus inter pares* and seldom even that.

Further, the House is a school, a public school in the truly national meaning of the word: nowhere else is the idea so well understood that the boys are fathers of the men. Here in the House, as there in the school, are boys of various ages, sorts and conditions; the big boys, no doubt, by willing acknowledgment, only they must not presume to bully the little ones; the overpoweringly clever boys, only they must not lord it intellectually over the duller ones,

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but help them up rather than frown them down; the precocious boys, only they must not disport themselves too fast lest they meet with an awkward check from their elders; the pugnacious boys, only they must not be too quarrelsome lest blows should begin to fly and "a row" arise scandalizing the whole institution. The Speaker is the Head Master indeed, and his authority over each boy is plenary; but even then the enforcement depends on the suffrages of the whole body. In this school there is this superiority over all other schools, in that the boys as a whole feel that they must by self-discipline train themselves to sustain the moral authority of their Head Master, as the one bond which holds their body corporate together.

Lastly, the House is the national theatre; the Chamber is its stage; the precincts are its green rooms; the Members are the actors, hopeful not for applause from the immediate spectators, but for the approval of the vast body outside; the debates are the representatives with divers dramatic incidents; the footlights

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are the glare of public opinion beating upon them; the galleries are here the same as in all theatres, only the players must be beware of playing too much up to them; the pit and boxes are symbolized by the students and observers of parliamentary procedure, management, and results. Happy is he who can walk these classic boards with a gait that shall satisfy fair and generous criticism, and shall speak his part with a voice that may penetrate the hearts not only of his constituents but of the majority among his countrymen.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PRECINCTS AND THE BUILDINGS

HAVING in the preceding Chapter discussed the question whether the House of Commons can be considered a Club—I proceed in this Chapter to describe shortly the buildings, the chambers and the precincts of the House, as they are seen—not so much by the public but by a Member.

There is, of course, an entrance on the ground floor for Members only. This leads into the Mediæval cloisters of St. Stephen, constructed during the Tudor time in the florid Gothic style; the roof being quite exquisite in stonework. These form the four sides of a quadrangle. As an annex on one side, and slightly jutting out into the quadrangle is a small chamber in the same

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elaborate style. In this beautiful apartment according to a consistent tradition the death warrant of Charles I. was signed. These cloisters are used as a cloak room for the Members—where they hang their overcoats only, as their hats are carried with them always by the etiquette of the House. Each one of the 760 Members has a peg with his name attached, the names being arranged alphabetically.

Near the end of this lovely and classic quadrangle, a short flight of steps descends to a lower level, below the surface of the ground. This leads to a semi-subterranean chapel, commonly called “the crypt,”—though it is not really a crypt, but is probably the first chapel of St. Stephen that was built before the larger chapel was undertaken, as will be mentioned presently. This crypt chapel in its inception must be of great age. It was most elaborately completed and decorated in the Tudor time. These grand old decorations have been fully and faithfully

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restored down to the minutest detail of colouring and gilding. So the interior is now at least as good as it was in the days of its most gorgeous magnificence. In boldness yet gracefulness of outline, in richness and yet refinement of decoration, it is not in its particular way, surpassed by anything in this kingdom, hardly perhaps in any other country. The old stone flooring has been replaced by very fine Minton tiling. This, however good in itself, being obviously modern, is out of keeping with the old chapel; and the introduction of it was artistically a mistake.

From these cloisters the Member may ascend by a spiral staircase of excellent, though modern, style to the Lobby of the House, and ordinarily he will do so.

But if minded to look about him, he may turn into Westminster Hall—that wonderful Hall, the history of which would be an epitome of the annals of England for nearly a thousand years. He will feel a melancholy interest in the spot marked by a brass plate

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where Charles I. stood at the bar of the Tribunal to receive the death sentence; and he will reflect on the several State trials that have taken place here, full of romance, pathos and tragic consequence. He will ascend a flight of steps and enter St. Stephen's Hall. He will doubtless inform himself regarding the history of this beautiful place, which is one of the most interesting places in this Kingdom or in any other, which is daily traversed by hundreds of the public on their way to and from the Houses of Parliament, but which is often passed by without heed of the strange vicissitudes that have befallen it. He will find that it was originally that Chapel Royal of the Palace of Westminster—which was made over by the English Kings to the two Houses of their Parliament—that the sacred uses of the Chapel ceased after the Reformation, when under a Protestant sovereign it was appropriated for the Commons—that here the Commons sat regularly from the fifteenth



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century, through the Rebellion and the Commonwealth, through the dynasties of Stuart and Guelph till the conflagration of 1834, that on the building of the new Houses, which are still in use, the chapel chamber was reconstructed nobly well as a Hall, with splendid windows and roof, and with statues of all the great parliamentary orators whose voices have been heard therein, to be called St. Stephen's Hall—that the position of the Lobby where Spencer Perceval was assassinated is marked by brass plates. Thence he enters the central hall again, a noble structure exactly in the midst of the mighty pile. Behind him is the St. Stephen's Hall already mentioned; in front are the corridors leading towards the Thames frontage, on the right is the frescoed corridor leading to the Lords, on the left a similar corridor leading to the Commons. These frescoes being glass covered are well preserved; they represent the most dramatic scenes in English history during the last three centuries. In the right

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hand corridor there are two frescoes which have always excited the mournful sympathy of all spectators, namely, the burial of Charles I. and the farewell interview between Lord and Lady William Russell. Then the Member reaches the outer Lobby, or ante-room and vestibule of the Commons, a square lofty hall finely decorated.

Thus the Member reaches the Chamber which is technically the material House of Commons as distinguished from the personal House. Like everyone else he is struck by its smallness; as compared with the mighty parts that are acted in it, and the drama which is daily exhibited in this little theatre. It is too narrow in its dimensions to hold more than two-thirds of its own Members, who on great occasions are crowded and crushed out of their own Chamber.

The Speaker's throne too, bearing the time honoured name of the Chair, is insignificant in reference to the dignified functions discharged by its occupant. Its plainness too

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will strike him in contrast with the handsomeness and richness displayed in all other parts of the national fabric. This insufficiency of size was an initial error in the designing of this chamber, the reason apparently was that the words of the Members even in a conversational debate should be caught easily in this small space. This is true enough; and though the speaking is often badly heard and is sometimes inaudible, owing to the noisiness, restlessness, and casual conversation of the Members, yet when the Members are quiet then the acoustic properties of the Chamber are excellent. The defect in size is one of those faults which is always admitted but never remedied; structural difficulties are alleged, but these might be overcome, if a will on the part of the House were really manifested, which there is not; the Members complain at first, but become accustomed to that which is, as many associations gather round it, and so silence and acquiescence ensue. Around the Chamber

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are the Division Lobbies, for "the Ayes" on the right side of the Chair, and for "the Noes" on the left. These are much used as writing tables by the Members; though convenient, they are by no means large enough. The galleries for the Members and the adjoining writing rooms are fairly good; and so is the gallery for the Newspaper Reporters. But the public gallery, which includes that for the Peers, that for Ambassadors and distinguished persons, and that for strangers at large, is poor and inferior to that which would be allowed by most legislative assemblies of lesser consequence than the British Commons; while the gallery for ladies is miserably uncomfortable.

Thence the Member would proceed to the tea-room which is comfortable enough, though very poor for such an assembly as this; in it there stands the old Table of the House of Commons in early times; that classic table, on one side of which, in the days when parliamentary freedom was in the balance, Pym

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Hampden and Cromwell used to sit, and the Royalist Members on the other. Adjoining this is the Newspaper room, which is well stocked up to a certain point, in that it contains a copy of almost every newspaper of the Metropolis, of the large cities, and of every county in the kingdom. Perhaps no other reading room in the Kingdom is quite so well provided in this respect. The room itself is poor in the extreme; almost every club in London has a better room for this purpose.

Then the Member proceeds to the dining rooms, three in number, fairly well constructed, and facing the Thames, indeed overlooking the river; this airy outlook is of great advantage, probably no other dining rooms in the Metropolis have such an outlook. Nevertheless in regard to the dimensions of the structure as a whole, and to the importance of these dining rooms where it is a matter of parliamentary policy to induce the Members to dine habitually, they are not fine enough for their public object; and the architects could not

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have understood at the time how important these apartments would become in the future. They are, for example, inferior to the dining rooms in the best London Clubs. They are large enough for the average number of Members who will dine in them. But when owing to any cause arising from the debates or proceedings of the House, (which does happen several times every session), a large proportion of the House is staying there for dinner, the crush and discomfort pass description, and have often been the theme of satire. Certainly the conditions of the dining room though quite good enough for very zealous Members, has operated to induce many Members, less zealous, to go elsewhere, whom it would have been convenient for parliamentary managers to detain in or about the House.

The Smoking Rooms are, I always understood, regarded as fairly adequate by those who are competent to judge.

The Library has been already mentioned in the preceding Chapter, it adjoins the dining

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rooms; has five compartments all opening into one another; each of which contains a separate branch of literature; in the quality of its books, it is one of the good libraries of the kingdom; its interior is most comfortable; its aspect is highly picturesque; its outlook over the Thames is the best possible; it has an establishment of librarians to help Members in finding quickly, any reference they may want; in fine, it is the pride of the Commons.

The Member should now ascend by a fine stone stair case to the Committee Rooms in the upper storey, which are quite noble, looking right over the river, commanding a fine view, and catching southerly, or south easterly breezes. Most of these rooms are lofty, spacious, and well furnished; they are for the most part of the same or similar dimensions; except one, which is a fine oblong chamber, fitted up with seats on either side, after a plan resembling that of the House itself; and thus suited for the work of Grand Committees from the whole House, (which will be mentioned

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hereafter), or for any assembly larger than that of an ordinary Committee. The other rooms are suited for Committees of from ten to twenty Members, with space for the witnesses who may be called by them, and for counsel, or agents who may plead before them. The proceedings which here take place, are of extreme consequence to large interests, to corporations, to individuals. Many of these Committees will be for the investigation of certain subjects directly or indirectly, more or less before the Commons, or for the examination of Bills, (projects of law) referred to them by the House—they will generally be called Select Committees. Some of them are Standing Committees, which sit regularly every session, as for example, the Committee on Public Accounts to which the House refers the accounts of the monies voted by it for all purposes. Many of them are, however, smaller Committees of four Members each, to report on the Bills required for the sake of private enterprises for public purposes, railways,



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canals, waterworks, harbours, and others. It is before these Committees that the counsel plead for or against the Bills; and inasmuch as the Bills involve contentious matter, comprising vast sums of money, eliciting either objections in detail from other parties, or opposition all round, there is infinite room for trained and professional disputation. Consequently barristers of high rank are employed by the parties on both sides, and they, seniors and juniors together, form what is known as the Parliamentary Bar. The lucrative work of this Bar is the pleading before these Committees. The counsel will have to undergo some study during the few weeks before Parliament meets, and a little during the earlier weeks of the session. But from March onwards, the business comes thick and heavy on them, emergent, laborious, and absorbing. The witnesses are numerous enough, mostly scientific, and the cross examination of them regarding their scientific dicta is acute. Parliamentary Agents preparing the Bills are

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numerous and influential; they attend to supply particulars to the Counsel, and occupy a position analogous to that of Solicitors. Behind the table where the Counsel sit, is a space for the public to hear and to see.

All along this space, and looking towards the interior of the House, is a long corridor of some breadth too, one of the longest in any building of Britain. All the doors of the many Committees open into it, and side seats are ranged along its length. It is most commodious for the multitude of people who must resort for various reasons to the Committees. It serves the same purpose as Central Halls serve for the Courts of Justice. Any busy morning, from noon to three o'clock, this immense corridor presents an animated spectacle from end to end. The moving, stirring, restless crowd consists of barristers, agents, clients, witnesses, interested parties, miscellaneous spectators. Now and again the packed throng will part and make way for a Member who may be passing to or from one of

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the Committee Rooms. To a stranger desirous of gathering a notion as to how an integral part of the nation's work is carried on, few sights can be more curious and suggestive than this.

Then the Member may descend by a dark and awkward stair-case, to the ground floor of Parliament. He will notice first, the series of low-vaulted chambers where Members entertain their friends, especially if these be ladies.

The provision of any accommodation for the entertainment of ladies is a matter of grace, and doubtless, this was not contemplated by the designers or architects. Otherwise, some space might have been allowed conformable to hospitable ideas, if such hospitality is to be permitted at all. As it is, no complaint is made of the quaint little apartments, doubtless because the visitors are preoccupied by the incidents, important members coming and going, sitting down to table, and rising up again, also by the very distinguished guests who are often assembled, and by the traditions of the spot. Especially if after dinner, the

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company adjourns on the evening, or to the beautiful Terrace about to be mentioned, when the view will be as fine as any to be seen in Venice by lamplight.

Hence the Member will issue forth upon the Terrace, the crowning glory of the whole structure. The fine pavement sets off the lengthening perspective ; the three stories of the House with the pinnacles, windows, carved abutments, look down majestically upon it. An architectural mass, mainly square, closes the view at each end, north and south, one of these masses being the Speaker's Palace. A low but massive stone wall separates the pavement from the Thames, which flows close beneath, like the bulwarks on the side of a mighty ship. On the whole it is the finest terrace in this country, probably in any other. The view from it is most imposing : near on the left is Westminster Bridge, and the spectator may watch the traffic of the bridge and hear its roll or rumble while he is in the quietude of the Terrace. Between the broad arches he may perceive the graceful

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outlines of Waterloo Bridge. In front of him is St. Thomas' Hospital with its separate houses; to his left front is Lambeth Palace looming grandly, to his left is Lambeth Bridge. At night the long rows of lamplight in all directions are reflected on the river. Added to that the moon may be seen rising pale over Lambeth, while the windows in the dark architecture of the House cast a ruddy glare.

This is the spot where the tea parties are held, well known in London society, and probably having some repute throughout the country. To have "tea on the Terrace," as the phrase goes, is the natural ambition of everyone. It is of the utmost convenience to the Member to be able to shew this attention to his friends, and especially to his constituents and their families. On a summer afternoon the collection of these tea parties amounts to a reception given by the Commons to London and to the constituencies. The mixture of tea-tables is typical of the local character. Here will be a table with some of the most fashionable persons, near

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it will be one where a Labour Member is entertaining his family. Next will be one where a philosophic Member is receiving learned ladies. The whole scene is one of diversified animation and vivacity not to be paralleled in any other place where men do congregate.

When Members in summer entertain their friends at dinner in the House, they adjourn with their guests to the Terrace in the evening by lamplight, and then the scene is commonly called "The English Venice."

## CHAPTER IV

### LIFE IN PARLIAMENT

It is to be remembered that according to the plan of this work, the parliamentary life now to be outlined is that of the non-official, or, as they are called, the Private Members, and of them only; and they of course constitute the main body of the House. The description does not relate to the official Members who sit on the two Front Benches on either side of the Table of the House.

The life, then, led in Parliament by Private

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Members varies greatly according to the circumstances of each Member. A certain number of Members are politicians or parliamentarians simply and purely. This number is doubtless variable from one general Election to another. Probably it is not so great as might be desired, and is less than half of the whole House. Such men are persons of independent means, and have no occupation except that which relates to public or national affairs. They are not indeed men of leisure, for they are sure to be beset by many public engagements. Still, they are masters of their own time; and they are at liberty to devote themselves to the work of the House during the Session, and to meetings concerning parliamentary affairs during the recess. They are, however, in no wise to be classed as professional politicians; they are under no personal obligations, and seek for no immediate reward. Such men may or may not take a prominent part in the debates inside the chamber of the House, or be conspicuous figures before the public, or have their utterances



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frequently reported in the newspapers. But the vast mass of business in the precincts of the House outside the Chamber is done mainly, if not almost entirely, by them. Their country perhaps little knows how hard they have to labour for many months in each year: and how needful is the existence of such a class if the parliamentary business of the nation is to be properly discharged. Moreover, as they attend the Debates and other proceedings inside the Chamber more regularly than any other class of Members, their influence on the general conduct of the House is proportionately the greater.

On the other hand, there is another class, variable in numbers no doubt from one General Election to another, but always large, and probably comprising full half or more than half of the whole House, sometimes even two-thirds. This consists of those who have either some sort of business, commercial and the like, or else some profession that must claim their attention, during the hours of the day at least. They are inavoidably prevented from giving the whole

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or even the greater part of their time to the House. They must first attend to their business or their profession—that is obligatory. This done, they will give what time they can to the House, and by care, sometimes even by over-exertion, they will contrive to do the essential business, the bigger part of the parliamentary work, fairly well—though it may be impossible for them to follow the details. Fortunately for them, much of the work in the Chamber of the House falls to be done after five o'clock, when the business of the counting-house, the bank, or the Court of Justice, will be over. Still, it must be hard for a man who has been working all day at finance and at commerce, or for one who has been pleading in arduous cases before Judge and Jury, to go straight to the House, and attend to debates till midnight. He will have to do it, and actually does it occasionally—but it must generally be beyond his endurance if the debates be long drawn out. Thus Members of this class are prevented, without any fault of their own, from giving constant attendance inside the

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Chamber, and still less to the work outside the House in the precincts and in the Committee Rooms.

Nevertheless this second class of Private Members of all sorts is just as valuable as the first or purely political class just described. It supplies the practical acquaintance with the business pertaining to a commercial nation like ours. Its legal element is of much weight and influence in legislation. It affords largely that knowledge which is needful for the management of our complex domestic policy in every branch of the national industries, save perhaps that of agriculture. Moreover the great barristers in the House have often proved ornaments in its Debates, and many memorable speeches have been made by them. Agriculture generally has representatives of its own who are not of the business class, but will mostly be country gentlemen.

None suppose that there are too many merchants or bankers, or financiers in the House, or even too many Solicitors, for the

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advice of all these is constantly required in those Debates which are in their nature of consultative. But the number of Barristers in the House has often called forth notice and even criticism. The number of these again is variable, but it must often stand at a hundred, and it has sometimes been reckoned at even more. At all events it represents an appreciable proportion, say one fifth or one sixth. Critics, while admitting that a goodly number of such members is desirable so that the House may be well informed regarding the laws of the country, do yet contend that the actual number is and always has been too large, and that this one particular profession has more than a full share of influence. The cause is obvious enough, namely this, that the appointments to the Judicial Bench, and to the highest posts virtually beyond the Bench, are often perhaps mostly given to barristers who are in Parliament. This practice has prevailed in past days as much as in the present day. Its existence seems to be so fixed that further

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reference to its merits or demerits would be superfluous.

In this class there is a section deserving a brief notice separately. Some Members are avowedly elected by particular industries and professions—to represent certain interests specially. Consequently, while they bestow a general regard to the affairs of the House, their primary duty is to guard the interests for the sake of which they were elected. The number of such Members has increased of late, and will probably increase still further. It comprises the Labour Members, the representatives of the shipping interests, the Educational Members and others.

As already mentioned comment has often been made on the number of Railway Directors in the House. These cannot however be traced to any particular class. They are to be found scattered here and there among all sections of Members, sometimes among the leisured and independent classes, and sometimes among the business classes.

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Such being in the most general terms the main classes in the House, we approach directly the question as to how each class leads its parliamentary life.

At the outset there is no disguising the fact that some Members take the responsibilities of Membership more seriously than others. Some Members with large connections in the Metropolis, moving by old association in London society, having social avocations of great variety and extent, attend the House for performance of such duty as may be imperatively necessary, but do not otherwise take an onerous or active share in the work. They will attend daily in the afternoon no doubt, ascertain when Divisions are likely to occur or when their presence is likely to be needed, and make a point of voting in every Division which may concern the maintenance of their Party or the safety of the Government which they are supporting, or the interests of their constituents. Even then they may pair, by finding someone of the opposite party of a similar disposition as regards

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attendance. By such pairing, their absence for a considerable time on the Continent or elsewhere are occasionally arranged. But as a rule they will, unless some cogent or urgent avocation arises, endeavour to be present in every critical division. Thus a Member might attend in the afternoon and go away before the dinner hour; and after fulfilling social engagements return to the House at eleven o'clock in time for the important Division which will usually take place between that hour and midnight. Such a career, though useful and consistent with public duty up to a certain point, is neither arduous nor exhausting.

The practice is very similar with the business men and the professional men, already mentioned. But for these it is to be said that they have hard and fatiguing work of their own to do before they enter the House.

This explanation is necessary, because the public outside hearing that for some Members the parliamentary labours tax endurance to the utmost, would be inclined to doubt the fact

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seeing that some Members pass through the ordeal quite easily. The case then is as stated above; there certainly are some Members for whom the service of the House is neither tiring nor troublesome.

But for those who regard their service with the utmost seriousness—and they make up over one quarter, perhaps one third, of the House—the work is harassing, fatiguing and in the long run exhausting. These are the busy Members, who of their free will in running what they consider their patriotic career, push forward and carry to its conclusion the executive and legislative business of the Commons. It is indeed lucky for the Nation that many competent and trustworthy men are always found to act thus. Such a Member has a hard life during the Session. Going to bed at one o'clock in the morning he must rise at eight o'clock and attend to the correspondence, which is always heavy for an active parliamentarian, before he proceeds to the House by half-past eleven in readiness for the Committee work



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which opens at noon. This work, which often imposes much mental strain goes on to Question time, between three and four, when he will be in his place in the Chamber. After that he will be either watching or participating in the Debates. He will dine in the House, often getting about as much time as is allowed to a traveller in an express train stopping for dinner. Then he returns to the Chamber: and if he can steal a few minutes of time it will probably be to confer with some constituent or other political friend in the precincts of the House. He will sit in the Chamber till midnight, when the main business of the House is stopped. But he will probably be engaged in some Private Members Bills—a matter demanding vigilant promptitude—till near half-past twelve.

In recent times Obstruction has played and will continue to play an important part in the proceedings of the House. By the rules of Parliament, time is ever of consequence as being marked out by certain dates which are limits not to be transgressed. Legislation not com-

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pleted in one Session is dropped, and if resumed at all must begin all over again. Often when a measure or a policy cannot be defeated by direct opposition it may be delayed till virtually stopped by lapse of time. It can be hindered by a hundred devices—such as speeches long drawn out, hydra-headed objections, amendments, discussions, and the like, not always intended for the measure to which they are applied. Often a lesser measure is debated interminably in order that it may block the way of another measure for which the hindrance is really meant. All this goes by the name of Obstruction. At one time it had a sinister sound to English ears because it happened then to be practised by the Irish Nationalists.

In truth and fairness, however, we must admit that there is no term to which so much misrepresentation is applied as Obstruction. If kept within limits—and they must be broad—it is a legitimate mode of parliamentary warfare. It is indiscriminately adopted by all parties without exception for their own policy as against

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their opponents. Each party in turn complains of this method being used against itself, and in turn uses it in the same way against opponents. The Unionist Party complained of Irish Obstruction against its legislation, and then obstructed with at least equal skill the Home Rule Bill. Then it was the turn of the Irish to complain, in forgetfulness of what they had themselves done. Had not the Bill regulating the Church in Wales been summarily stopped it would have been obstructed at every step by the Conservatives. There is not any political candour in the complaints, the excuse for them is that they are made under natural vexation and impatience.

The only question that can be entertained regarding Obstruction will relate to its limitation. The method began shortly before 1884. In the absence of limitation it became intolerable. After 1885 the closure was made stricter and stricter, and has now been pushed as far as it can be in fairness. The rules are probably as good as they can be—consistently always

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with parliamentary freedom. But the wit of man cannot devise rules that would preclude the exercise of ingenuity by Members in going beyond the limits which the said rules were intended to impose. This transgression is called in the House an abuse of the rules. Such abuse was often committed by the Irish Nationalists in 1887, and sometimes in other years too. But now-a-days the Speaker is vested with strong powers of repression, and if he exerts them with discreet firmness the limits will be sufficiently observed. But it should be remembered that obstruction is and will remain a potent factor in parliamentary proceedings.

Of all parliamentary questions the hardest to answer will be, what is success inside the House, and of what does it consist? Such a question becomes impossible to answer summarily because such success is of diverse kinds. Indeed certain kinds of success are attainable by every Member who really tries to attain them. Certain kinds again depend largely on aristocratic connections, and they are attainable

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by a few only. It is most fortunate for the stability of the Realm, that the ideas which are truly aristocratic find favour with the British democracy; and this outside tendency is strongly reflected inside the House. A young man of talent and aristocratic connection will rise by leaps and bounds; another young man of at least equal merit but of middle class connection may be years in reaching the same eminence, or may never reach it at all. Of all advantages in the House the greatest is youth, no other advantage is equal to that. There is no maxim more certain than this, that if a Member is to make a great figure in the House of Commons he cannot begin too young. It is as difficult for the elders to say how an ambitious young Member starting from his early years gradually works his way to success, as it is to tell how a climber ascends from the bottom of a big trunk up to the tall branches. The instances of men attaining the highest rank in the Commons, who had not begun early in life, are very rare. Mr. John Morley is a

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signal instance indeed to the contrary; but in his eminent case there were special circumstances, connected with Mr. Gladstone and Home Rule, which rendered this precedent very peculiar. A Member past middle life say from forty to fifty-five years of age may begin a career of a certain kind within the House in a solid and useful, but probably not in a brilliant, manner. Beyond that age Members who have previously learnt the way of working in Parliament may continue to work even to an advanced time of life. But those who begin a career in Parliament late in life will not do much inside the House, however important they may be in politics outside it. Whether the success in the outer world always comes to him who deserves it, or not, is a problem we leave to the moralists. But in the House of Commons it does almost infallibly come in some shape or other to the deserving. The shapes indeed are various, but each one of them is tangible; and they are suited to the varying antecedents, abilities, opportunities of the various Members.

## *Life in Parliament*

To each Member there falls some sort of success if he sincerely qualifies himself for it. Such success is soon known in the proper circles—after that it may spread to the outer world, though such diffusion will be slower. Nowhere in this world has real merit of whatsoever kind a greater certainty of success in some form or other than in the House of Commons. Excepting only the advantage of aristocratic connection—undoubtedly great—the success is apportioned to the merit of the effort made. Those who begin their exertion past middle life, cannot expect the same reward as those who have been working all along from their early manhood. As the labour is various, on the green benches, in the division lobbies, in the precincts of the House—in the Committee rooms—in consistency of example in all things—so are the rewards. But some reward or other comes to him who labours and this too in proportion to his merit. In no career can this be more truly said than in a parliamentary one. Doubtless some Members will have

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quitted the House with a feeling of disappointment at their career in it. But probably this must have been because they had originally pitched their expectations too high, or because they had not exactly adjusted their efforts to what was possible for them to achieve.



## CHAPTER V

### MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE HOUSE.

HAVING in the preceding Chapter described shortly something of the life led in and about the House of Commons, I proceed to describe the manners and customs of the House inside the Chamber, where the principal business of the nation is conducted. It is to be premised that the term House has two senses. First, there is obviously the material sense; but, secondly, there is the more important and personal sense, that which indicates the whole body of the Members. It is to them that the Member refers in a debate when he says "this House." To them also a Member refers when he speaks of a "full House," or the reverse. But outside the whole structure, when a Member says he is going

## *The House of Commons*

to the House, he may mean the word in the personal sense, but more probably he means it in the material.

The British Parliament differs from almost if not quite every other legislative assembly in doing its work, not at reasonable hours in the middle of the day, but in the evening and the night. At first sight any observer or inquirer would ask why this should be? The reason is not far to seek and it is this. The proportion of men of business and of professions is so large in the House that the hours of parliamentary business must be made to suit them as they could not attend in the daytime. The Members in the Front Official Bench, too, like the arrangement because they can attend their offices in the daytime before "going down to the House" as the phrase runs. If they alone were concerned however, the night would not be turned into day as it is. But the last and perhaps decisive reason is this, that for a considerable part of a Session the affairs in the various committees are of great consequence. These committees

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must sit in the daytime from noon onwardly, and the Members composing them would be debarred from the debates of the House if it were sitting at that time of the day. Otherwise, for the really working Members, as already described in a previous Chapter the assimilation of the hours of the House to those of all other business centres would be a great boon. In the arduous Sessions of my time what a comfort it would have been to us busy Members if we could, like other mortals, have gone forth in the morning to our labour till the evening—to begin at ten in the forenoon and end at six in the evening. The difference in health and strength would have been enormous.

Since 1888 there has been a partial reform of the hours of business. Formerly the House used to meet late in the afternoon and sit on past midnight without any fixed limit of time—in practice it usually sat well into the small hours of the morning, except on the occasions when it sat still later. The growth of the Irish Nationalist Party in number and strength

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rendered a change in the rules necessary. Before 1885 this Party may have been some thirty strong. In 1886 it entered a new Parliament with a strength of over eighty. The course of political events rendered them desirous of giving as much trouble as possible. I mention the fact without at all criticising them, as they held this course to be conducive to the Irish interests which they had to maintain. In 1887 they succeeded in giving trouble so effectually that new rules had to be introduced in 1888. Accordingly the House was to meet at three in the afternoon and sit till midnight when the main business of the House would be stopped mechanically. Any subsidiary business would then be taken if unopposed and would not last long, as the expedition of the House in despatching business is wondrous when it has a mind to do so. Thus as a rule Members are released from attendance at half-past twelve. On emergencies, though rarely, but towards the end of a Session frequently, the House suspends the twelve o'clock rule,

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and then the contest may go on to any hour in the morning, or throughout the night, by what is called "an all night sitting." Notwithstanding these occasional aberrations, "the twelve o'clock rule" was a real reform for the sake of the working members, and rendered the parliamentary life endurable for them which was fast passing their patience and endurance. If the surviving parliamentarians of the older time shall contrast the greater miseries which they sometimes suffered with what has nowadays to be borne—it is yet to be remembered that the Sessions are longer than they used to be and the calls upon a Member under the present electoral system are far more pressing in a hundred ways than they were in former times.

This latter point may be well illustrated by the development of what are technically called "Questions," and which are put by Private Members to Ministers. Formerly these were few. Some very old Members can remember when a Question being notified was a rare occurrence. In recent years they have become numerous, from

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fifty or more each day. The Member who puts the question merely indicates the number on the notice paper to save the reading out, but the Minister must answer orally, and be liable to a certain amount of cross-questioning. An hour or more of the best time of the House is thus taken up daily. Often has there been consideration as to whether this cannot be abridged, but in vain. The Private Members will not, indeed ought not, to surrender this privilege. It is indeed the only means they have of making themselves felt by the Ministry of the day, of bearing their share in controlling the destiny of the British Empire, of doing their duty in detail towards their constituents, and of maintaining "the Grand Inquest" of the nation.

After these Questions the regular fixed business begins on the motion and under the guidance of the Ministry of the day. Monday and Thursday being devoted to the great measures of the Session as introduced and promoted by the Government ; Tuesday and Friday being in the

## *Manners and Customs of the House*

early part of the Session allowed to Private Members for the introduction of their measures—and to “supply” the well-known name which indicates the voting of money to the Crown for the services of the country. On these days there is some modification of the business hours. The House meets at two o’clock for what is called a “morning sitting,” and sits till five, when there is an adjournment till seven, when the House resumes work and sits as usual. On Wednesday there is a short sitting from noon till six, which is devoted to Private Members for a goodly part of the Session. But of later years, as the pressure of the Governmental business increases, the Ministers of the day have contracted the habit of obtaining the permission of the House to take up the time otherwise allowed to Private Members. After Easter, if not before, their Tuesdays and Fridays are sacrificed, soon after Whitsuntide, the Wednesdays fall victims also, though the days of the sacrificial rites vary from Session to Session.

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In short, the power of Private Members respecting legislation was once considerable but is now a thing of the past. The influence of the age is all against them in this respect. They may pass just a few lesser Bills which are so fortunate as to obtain universal acquiescence ; they may introduce literally hundreds of Bills which are as little figures paraded on the stage for the formation of public opinion or for the satisfaction of certain sections among the constituencies ; but that is all. Their principal power is now exerted at “Question time,” as already explained, and that is practically effective in regard to the concerns of the Nation and the Empire. Their next power is at the time of “Supply.” Not only can they raise all sorts of objections on every vote under each head of service—but they can raise a general debate before the House “goes into supply,” as the phrase runs, that is before the voting of public money begins. This is done on the time honoured maxim of “grievances before supply.” During many arduous Sessions when the



## *Manners and Customs of the House*

pressure of legislative business was extreme, the "supply" business used to be deferred until want of time precluded proper discussion. Votes too used to be taken in the old order; insignificant items coming first would be discussed "*ad nauseam*" at excessive length, and votes of really world wide importance would be relegated to the end of the Session, when they could be discussed only by experts before empty benches. This grave fault has been happily remedied of late. Supply is now taken early in the Session and the votes are brought forward in order of their importance.

The etiquette of the House is so far elaborate that new Members usually take some time in learning it, and in the meanwhile make many small mistakes which provoke the mirth of the initiated, especially when cries of "order" arise, and the innocent offender apparently fails to imagine in what respect he can have offended. The disposing of the hat often puzzles the new comer who does not understand when he may or may not put it on, according as he may be sitting

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or standing. It is not permissible to address the House as if it were a meeting; indeed the Member when speaking should address his speech to the Chair, that is to the Speaker. It is a breach of order to allude to another Member by name, such a mistake would even be noticed by the Chair. He must be named in connection with his constituency, and the great increase in the number of constituencies by the last Reform Act has augmented the difficulty of remembering them all. Moreover—it is a matter of courtesy to mention the title together with the constituency, and thus for a simple name there is some circumlocution, as for example, the Right Honourable Baronet the Member for the University of Oxford, if such happened to be the case—or the Noble Lord the Member for the Wick Boroughs. Otherwise the title of Honourable is always accorded to the Private Member, who for example, may be alluded to in debate as the Honourable gentleman who has just spoken. To the generic title of Honourable there must be added gallant if

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the Member belong to the military or naval profession, or learned if he be a barrister. All these details are punctiliously and tenaciously observed, whatever be the heat or the hurry or the excitement at the moment.

The business begins with Prayers, read by the chaplain standing at the Table of the House, next to the Speaker, who gives the responses, and does not ascend his Chair till after the short service. The proceeding is as decorous as possible; and on days of political ferment, it is strange to contrast the repose of the Chamber, like that of any church, with the ferment which will ere long arise within these walls. The number of Members present is seldom large, except when some memorable debate is expected shortly afterwards.

The election of a Speaker is an act performed with some solemnity at the beginning of each Parliament, for the whole duration of which he is elected. He is proposed and seconded by some selected Member on each side of the House not belonging to either of the Front

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Benches. He then addresses the House briefly from his seat on the green benches. He is then conducted by his proposer and seconder to the steps of the Chair. Standing on these steps he thanks the House for his election. He takes his seat on the Chair and moves the adjournment of the House—so far he is in plain clothes. The next day he appears with knee breeches and bob wig and presents himself at the Bar of the Lords to report himself for the Royal approbation. This received he robes himself with gown and full-blown wig and takes his seat in the Chair. If two men are proposed for the Speakership then a division takes place in the usual way.

The powers of the Speaker over an individual Member were always considerable, and have been rendered greater than ever by recent Rules. His power of allowing or disallowing closure has been much augmented in recent years, and that has had a steadying influence. In a certain sense he is the master over an individual member—in extremity, however, he

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can do no more than stop the offender and name him to the House. The Leader of the House will then move that some judgment be passed on the offender thus named. The House is on the whole jealous and zealous in exercising its authority over an offender thus named to it by the Speaker; though, of course, the offence may be extenuated by those who have a mind thereto. As a rule the authority of the Speaker finds full support in the House and his influence in regard to Order is immense. As an officer of the highest rank he must be impartial; and enormous weight attaches to his moral authority. But it is to be always remembered that he has in the last resort no authority over the House, which is as regards its own conduct an independent assembly.

It generally happens at the beginning of a Parliament that the Cabinet Ministers are not present on the Front Bench for some days, having gone to their constituencies to seek the re-election which is required after their acceptance of office, according to ancient practice.

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During a moiety of its sittings the House is technically “in Committee”—that is it will be occupied in voting money to the Crown, or in settling the details of Bills which have been read a Second Time by the House. This Committee is one of the whole House and is distinct from the Committees which have a few Members each. The Committee business which comprises nearly half the work of the House is presided over by a Chairman, who, next to the Speaker, is the most important official in the House. He is the nominee of the Party in power, and is proposed to the House by the Leader of the Front Bench. He sits not in gown and wig in the Chair, but at the Table underneath the chair and in plain clothes. He has much the same powers as the Speaker—except that in the cases of great consequence to the Order in the House the Speaker is called into the Chair for the moment. But it is understood that ordinarily an appeal does not lie in the Speaker from any decision by the Chairman of Committees.

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When a successful Speaker retires it is usual for the House to submit a representation to the Sovereign praying that some mark of Royal favour be bestowed on him and adding that the House will make good the cost of the same; all which means that if the Crown will confer a Peerage, the House will vote a becoming pension; and this is always done.

While the Speaker and the Chairman of Committees must always be Members—there are three officers of great importance who sit in wig and gown at the historic Table, namely, the Clerk and the two Assistant Clerks. These are the standing authorities on all the complex and peculiar rules of business; as such they are constantly consulted by the Members. The Clerk is always a person of note; he is usually knighted; sometimes he attains higher honours; Erskine May, the Clerk and the Historian of the House, was admitted to the Privy Council and ultimately to the Peerage.

The term whip has a double application. First it is applied to a set of Members who are

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chosen by the Leaders of their Party to look after the attendance in and about the House of all their Members—a task requiring infinite tact, vigilance and patience. The Senior Whip is a man of real consequence and deep in the councils of the Party; he is often promoted to a seat in the Cabinet. Secondly, it is applied to a notice which is sent out daily during the Session to every Member of the Party indicating the business expected to come on and the degree of urgency attached to his attendance. These degrees are marked by underlining. One or two such underlines mean that the business is but moderately important. Four lines signify importance, and five lines are storm signals with a warning of emergency.\*

\*I have kept all these whip circulars as they may be interesting records of the time. There are ten volumes of them for my ten years in Parliament.



## CHAPTER VI

### SCENES IN THE HOUSE

THE foregoing description of the manners and customs of the House may be appropriately followed by some notice of scenes within the Chamber.

Some instances of disquietude, of wild and violent conduct, of disorder and indiscipline, of noisiness almost amounting to disturbance, have always occurred and do still occur occasionally or casually. Such events, being duly chronicled in the Press, impress the public memory, and are long remembered, while the quiet and peaceful course remains unnoticed and never presents itself to the mind. Notwithstanding what may be said against the demeanour of the House at times, the general

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characteristics are quietude, punctilio, courtesy, inside the Chamber.

When the Questions begin, as already mentioned, early in the afternoon, even on the quietest days, some animation will arise. If the Questioner be not satisfied he will press the Minister for further explanation, some kind of argument will be attempted, cries of "Order" will be heard, some breeze may spring up, the wind may freshen, and the Speaker may have to intervene. Indeed small scenes are not infrequent at this stage. It is very amusing to watch the storm begin, the clouds arise and spread over the Chamber, while the air becomes rapidly charged with electricity. When Questions are over, the big business comes on, and a full dress Debate is set up. At this hour which is ordinarily the best, a leading speaker or an Opposition Chief will lead the way, there will usually be a reply; and the attack and defence together will be the principal episode for the earlier part of the sitting. Hitherto the green benches will have

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been well filled or crowded, eager faces on either side of the chamber, cheers and counter-cheers, sudden interruptions to allow of personal explanation or to correct unintentional misrepresentation of what has been said. Then after the strain of attention for nearly two hours there will be a rush of Members leaving the House, so that no succeeding speaker can obtain any hearing at all. When the exodus shall have sufficiently subsided, a second or third rate speaker will rise. The speeches become shorter and of less and less consequence as the dinner hour approaches. After an interval of half-an-hour the debate is resumed and either lags, or lacks importance till ten o'clock. Then it gains strength through every quarter of an hour up to eleven when a critical stage is reached. If the contest is drawing near to its close, the most conclusive speeches by leaders on either side will be delivered between that hour and a few minutes before twelve, when the Division will take place. After well nigh every sentence of an able and

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effective speech there will be a kind of running commentary from friend and foe, with an accompaniment, like a chorus, breathing the spirit and sentiment of the hearers.

The management of the cheering in the Chamber forms a sort of science—the parliamentary cheer consisting of the words “hear, hear”—no applause, that is by clapping of hands, is allowed. The cheer from a single Member is not infrequent, but is not significant unless it comes from some leading personage. It is the cheering in chorus, like one mind and one voice from a number of Members, that forms the demonstration. This is often managed by a tacit consensus, but more often arises from an impulse stirring a body of men at the same moment from some words that have been uttered. The tone of the cheering then varies according to the temper of those who cheer, exactly according to their mood and sentiment at the moment. First there is the hearty, full-voiced cheer of genuine approval or satisfaction, hearty, resounding, full of encourage-

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ment, rising to the roof of the Chamber and awakening the echoes. There is next the low subdued cheer, gradually spreading along the green benches, indicating the deep seated agreement which does not seek vociferous or hilarious expression; this is used either on solemn occasions, or at moments of pathos, or in acknowledgement of some concession or confession on the part of an opponent. Then there is the ironical cheering, which cannot be described but must be heard to be appreciated; the tone of sarcasm is always unmistakeable; generally it is the cruel greeting given to an argument or a statement by an opponent, for the formal denying of which there may not be an opportunity. So far it is bitterly hostile; but sometimes good humoured enough, when applied to an opponent who has unwittingly uttered something that damages his own case. As an intensification there is the sarcastic cheer, which is still sharper and more incisive; this again must be heard to be realised, it cannot be described. In days when the younger

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Conservatives thought that Mr. Gladstone tried to overbear them by his superior position and experience, in furtherance of a policy which they hated, they used to apply this sort of cheering and it must have had a disconcerting effect. Supplementary to cheering there is laughter. This is often used for the same purposes as those to which ironical cheering is applicable. A statement made by an opponent with pompous solemnity is often disturbed by these simple means. Apart from this, the House is always in a merry mood; and a little laughter enlivens it if the debate is dull, or relaxes the strain of attention if there be excitement. The slightest slip of the tongue on the part of any speaker at any moment is the signal for merriment.

But whenever the debate approaches a crisis, or a definitely momentous decision the Members all without exception feel the most acute interest. This naturally leads to scenes, some of which are grand and honourable, while some again are not creditable to those concerned, being

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turbulent or flagrantly obstructive, or even tending to violence.

The first of the scenes seen by me was early in 1886 when the Conservative Government was defeated by the newly elected House just before midnight. It was received with comparative quietude. The Conservatives had some hours past known what was coming. The Liberals too were by no means triumphant, not knowing how they would fare with their Irish allies by whose help alone the victory had been won. But the Irish Nationalist Party, just assembled in their full numbers for the first time, and so finding their strength, cheered vociferously with much noisy demonstration; giving us all a foretaste of what was to be expected from them. In the summer of the same year there was a fine scene, which ought to be historic, when Mr. Gladstone's Government was defeated on his first Home Rule Bill, after an immense debate extending over many weeks, with ceaseless fluctuations of hope and fear on both sides.

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The full truth was not known by either party till the numbers were announced from the Chair amidst dead silence. Then the pent up excitement burst forth. The Conservatives on one side of the House rose in a body from their seats cheering lustily and waving their hats. As they sat down together the Liberal Unionists on the other side of the House rose similarly to salute their Conservative allies, cheering and waving their hats. So far the demonstrations had been within the rules of the House; the cheering had been measured, stately and sonorous. Now it was the turn for the Irish Nationalist Party. They rose up tumultuously and cried out "Three Cheers for the Grand Old Man," which salutation was accordingly accorded in the form usual in common meeting houses. This ceremony was followed by vituperation almost hissed out against the Liberal Unionist Leaders. No notice was taken, as the House did not wish to press upon those who were smarting under defeat.



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The next episode was early in 1887, when Lord Randolph Churchill rose to make his personal explanation as to his resignation which has surprised his party. A dense fog had penetrated the Chamber and as he stood to speak his thin wiry figure loomed in mistiness. He was received with some cheers, but sat down in silence; he who on concluding great speeches had been followed by long sustained and oft repeated cheering. His last words were that he appealed to the Cæsar outside the House, an appeal that was not answered.

In the summer of that year the Irish Nationalists so protracted the Debates on the Committee stage of the Irish Crimes Bill that the "Guillotine" process, as it was called, had to be adopted, by a special order of the House which was proposed before-hand and passed after debate. That is to say, at ten o'clock on the 17th June all the clauses not passed up to that hour were to be summarily put to the vote. On that day the House presented the beehive

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aspect which is always seen when some event is impending. The hours of debate glided along till half-past nine, when Sir Charles Russell rose to say the last word for the Bill. His cutting and telling remarks were received by the Conservatives with ironical cheers, and he was pointing at them with quivering forefinger, when the first stroke of ten was heard from the big clock of the Clock-tower. At this moment all our listening ears caught it.

In a silent Chamber the Irish Nationalists rose in a body. We feared disturbance, but no, they were only leaving the House in mute protest. Then the bill passed its stage quietly.

On the other hand some regrettable scenes have occurred. In the spring of 1887, it was a part of the Irish tactics to prevent the Irish Crimes Bill being introduced before Easter. To this end they desired to obstruct Supply which the Government were equally determined to pass. They furnished relays of Members to sustain the talking through all the hours of the night. Unfortunately the

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Government had not enough men at those unusual hours for employing the closure—a statutory number being at that time requisite. So the Whips were obliged to send for men from their homes in the fashionable squares of London. Many men came from their beds back to their seats, and so the closure was applied. But when one point had been closed another one was taken up, and so forth. So the dawn glimmered in the lighted Chamber, and then grey daylight streamed in, but the debates went on till breakfast time. By that time more men came in. The Government force waxed, that of the Opposition waned, and by one o'clock the Opposition yielded and the Supply passed.

In August, 1893, a grave case occurred. In justice to the House, however, it must be said that the case arose and ended in regard to a point of order which after all was successfully vindicated. The guillotine process was being applied by Mr. Gladstone's Government for passing one of the stages of his second Home

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Rule Bill, and the House was angrily excited. As the fateful stroke of the clock began which would stop debate Mr. Chamberlain was speaking. As he had to sit down a violent expression against him was distinctly heard from a Member of the Irish Benches. His Conservative allies were resolved to prosecute this, and appealed to the Chairman of Committees who was then in the Chair. He however did not see fit to interfere, and proceeded with the Division which was then impending. Thereon the Conservatives demanded that their appeal should be referred to the Speaker; and till this was done they refused to go to the Division. They calmly kept their seats with folded arms and hats on. Meanwhile the Liberal Members all left their seats and proceeded to the Division lobby, followed by the Irish Nationalists. While the Conservatives thus were on their seats, a Liberal Member came up to them and remonstrated sitting on the very seat usually occupied by their leader. He was pushed away, very slightly however.

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This appearance of a slight scuffle instantly brought back a number of Irish Members who were standing near the door of the House and rushed up. This brought another stream of Members rushing up to see what was the matter. Thus with the swaying to and fro among high-backed benches, not suited for such movements, there was for some moments a dangerous crush; in the midst of which one Irish Nationalist was struck by an Irishman of the Conservative Party. Order was immediately restored, the Speaker was called to the Chair, whereon the Conservatives laid their appeal against the Member who had used the expression regarding Mr. Chamberlain, and who accordingly withdrew it with due apology. The House then proceeded to a Division. I happened to be sitting right in the centre of this parliamentary cyclone. The first scuffle, very slight, began no doubt with the English; had they been alone this would never have been a disturbance; but the Irish were at hand and they instinctively

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fomented the trouble, introducing what was called a Donnybrook element into the affair.

Most of the episodes in Mr. Gladstone's parliamentary course were accompanied by striking scenes—as for instance, when he introduced his first and then his second Home Rule Bill, the chamber itself so crowded even in its galleries that extra seats had to be placed on the floor of the House—the Lords so anxious to get seats in their gallery that there was in the phrase of the day “an ugly rush of peers” to find places—when, as the Bill was just passing the Commons in order to go to its death in the Lords, he pointed with outstretched forefinger to the Conservative benches and said that never in his long career had he met with such relentless and unremitting opposition, whereon the Conservatives burst into cheers in acknowledgment of what they regarded as a testimony of their great opponent to their prowess in debate. On a hundred occasions there was a

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dramatic vein in Mr. Parnell's sayings and doings, though it is hard to single out any one of these incidents. But when in 1886 he spoke the last word from his side for the First Home Rule Bill, in a densely crowded Chamber, his sarcasm on the English policy in Ireland, and his contemptuous description of the long continued failure of the British Government to rule that Island, made up quite a climax of scorn and hate.\*

\* It may be said that a Parliament (as for example the present one) where the Conservatives are in a large majority will be more staid and quiet than one which is enlivened by a prevailing number of ardent Liberals.





## CHAPTER VII

### LEADING FIGURES IN PARLIAMENT

I AM in this Chapter to give an outline of the leading figures in the House of Commons. These word paintings, however slight, are sketches from nature taken by myself on the spot, that is, within the four walls of the Chamber. The men have all moved before us and among us within the last twenty years. Many of them are living still. My account then pertains to contemporary history only, which is always unavoidably imperfect, and must ever be written with reserve. The figures which moved and passed away before 1880 or 1882 have entered the domain of history where their careers can be reviewed with a completeness to which I lay no claim in this Chapter.

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Thus I do not undertake to describe Disraeli in the Commons, though as Beaconsfield in the Lords his name was still one to conjure with when I first became concerned in English politics.

In my time the foremost man was Mr. Gladstone. I saw him throughout the Home Rule episode of his career from 1886 to 1893; and was present when he made his last speech to the Commons in 1894. During that time he was the cynosure of all eyes in the Commons, and the observed of all parliamentary observers. Well as he may have been known outside, he was still more closely followed in the House, which was his own sphere, and this too by opponents as well as by friends and followers. When undertaking his crusade on behalf of Home Rule for Ireland, he was long past his prime. The once resonant voice had become husky, the well-poised intellect could not sustain a prolonged flight through the facts, figures and legislative details of an enormous measure, quite so well as of yore. He was far

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from being the man he was in the days of Palmerston or in his own first Premiership, when he made some of the finest financial statements ever heard in the House, or introduced measures most intricate with a lucidity still remembered in political circles. Still the conducting of the Home Rule crusade showed that some of his most interesting qualities remained—his noble passion, his lofty sentiment, his ardour for whatever he had persuaded himself to believe in, his wide sweep of thought, his richly stored memory, his command of imagery, his dramatic aspect and attitude, his histrionic manner, and above all his unconquerable will. No man ever had a higher ideal of, and a stronger respect and affection for, the House of Commons as an institution, with its time honoured rules, its order, its traditions, its character, than he; and no man ever did more to sustain these. Besides his mastery of its tactics, he was most adroit in parliamentary management and in Party leadership. He had a too exclusive regard for the Commons, as an

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Estate in the realm, and did not allow sufficiently for the Lords as the Second Chamber ; indeed he was constitutionally disposed to chafe under any restraint. As the head of a Government he set the highest example and studied to preserve the best tone possible. By his friends and followers in the House he was simply adored ; there is no other phrase than adoration to express their evident feeling for him. By his opponents he was regarded as a great speaker always, as a grand orator at times ; as a wondrous character, as a great gentleman in Parliament. It must, however, in truth be added that by many of his opponents he was regarded with an animosity and an indignation which they never directed against any of his colleagues, some of whom were second only to him in importance. The cause of this angry feeling in their minds is not far to seek. They held that he had gradually turned from one extremity in politics to another, that he had surrendered positions which he had undertaken to defend and had given up the keys of fortresses

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which he had been commissioned to hold. This view may or may not be correct, and if it were so, there may have been irresistible reasons for his conduct. Still the view was sincerely held by many; and with them it was just one of the considerations which would produce political dislike of some intensity. For all that, he was much admired by many of his opponents, as one who, all faults notwithstanding, had brought honour to the British name, not only in his own country but in the world. This fact was creditable to the patriotism of parliamentarians, and was proved by the fulness of attendance with which the Commons mustered to be present at his funeral.

There were many occasions which from surrounding circumstances were striking and which by his eloquence he rendered romantic, as, for example, when in 1886 on the eve of his defeat on the Home Rule Bill, he poured forth eloquence like a glowing stream, and figured Ireland desolate mournful, standing at the Bar of the House and pleading; when in 1887 in

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wrath at white heat, and with almost frantic gesticulation, he denounced the Crimes Bill as marking Ireland with a brand of permanent sign of inferiority, when in 1888 he seconded the address to the widowed Empress of Germany with appreciative sympathy beautifully and pathetically expressed; in 1893 when he denounced the Conservatives opposition with stately and magnificent declamation; in 1894 when he discussed bimetallism with a mastery of the economic statistics of the world, all carried in his head without notes, an astonishing achievement for a man of his age.

The career of Lord Randolph Churchill is for brilliancy and briefness hardly to be paralleled in parliamentary annals. Considering how large a space he filled in men's minds, what an overpowering personality he was, what an imposing memory he left behind him after his early death, it is hard for us to realize the shortness of the time during which he trod the great stage. He first came to notice as the leader of a peculiar group of four independent

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Members on the Conservative side in the Parliament of 1880 to 1885. It consisted of Mr. Arthur Balfour (now famous) of Mr. (now Sir John) Gorst and of Drummond Wolff, afterwards an Ambassador, besides himself and was dubbed the Fourth Party. In that capacity he shewed figuratively a wondrous elasticity, enterprise and agility. His audacity too was splendid; a young man actually, and in mien and aspect looking younger still, he would challenge the oldest and most famous Parliamentarians to single combat — “a very Marlbrook to the fight” seemed to be his motto. As the sessions rolled on he gradually showed himself to be not only a Rupert of Debate but an oratorial gladiator, with a power of grappling close, an unfailing resourcefulness and a perfect presence of mind. His knowledge at first scanty grew with every subject that he handled. In 1884 it was quite understood that in the event of the Conservatives attaining power some Office in the second rank at least must be offered him. Soon afterwards it was understood

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that he would accept nothing save what he might himself choose, and that if his choice fell on any of the highest Offices, some of his seniors must make way for him. When a Conservative Government was formed in the summer of 1885, under some difficulty, with the remnant of a session only before them, to be followed by dissolution, there was surprise in some quarters when he was appointed a Principal Secretary of State, and when it was found that he had chosen India as his department, his imagination having evidently been excited by visions of the East. During the remainder of that session he conducted in the House much of the defence of the newly formed government. In the autumn recess which followed, he conducted the Conservative campaign in the constituencies, making political orations of the utmost brilliancy and effectiveness. It was found that during his short stay in the India Office he won golden opinions by his considerateness towards colleagues and towards officials, by his deference to senior men, and by his quickness in learning matters previously



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unknown to him. He chose to contest a seat in Birmingham in order to do battle with John Bright as a foeman worthy of his steel.

During the first session of 1886 he sustained his parliamentary reputation, which had now become vast, by powerful speeches against Mr. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill. When Parliament was dissolved in the summer of that year he made orations more magnificent than ever, during the campaign that followed—till special trains had to run to carry his auditors to hear him speak. When shortly afterwards a Conservative government had to be formed he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the Commons ; thus becoming second in command ; and this great promotion was considered on all hands to be but due to his immense services for the cause and the Party, also to the weighty authority he had won for himself. During the short autumn session he held the Leadership with skill and coolness, and made speeches too of light and leading. He left on the Treasury the same favourable

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impressions as on the India Office, and gave promise of high financial capacity. During the recess he made several orations in what was now becoming his old style. Especially he delivered a speech at Dartford, memorable for its comprehensive Liberal recommendations, and for its tone of unrestricted personal authority in the councils of the Government. At Christmas time of that year the news of his sudden resignation came on his Party and on the nation like a thunder-clap or a bolt from the blue. The declared cause was that he had wished to reduce the charges for the Army and Navy, but that his colleagues had refused by reason of the growing armaments on the Continent. That this was the head and front of the affair may be quite believed, as he himself told the Commons on the reassembling of Parliament. But this must have been part of a whole which probably will not be known for a long time to come. He probably had reckoned on retrieving his positions, but he never succeeded in doing so. During that

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Parliament he took no leading part; appearing only on occasions; one of these being that of certain grants for some of the Royal Family when he made several fine speeches of signal loyalty. He travelled abroad very much and absence weakened his parliamentary influence. In the general Election of 1892 he was no longer the standard bearer of the Party, as he had given place to Arthur Balfour. He reappeared in the Commons with almost all of his old fire in 1893; but soon afterwards his friends were grieved at perceiving that signs of nervous failure had begun to appear. These sad symptoms increased till the beginning of 1894 when he sank and died. The untimely end of a career so wondrous though so short as his, caused hearty sorrow to comrades, to followers, and to opponents. To a host of friends he bequeathed a memory of splendid services rarely equalled in Party politics. Everyone felt that a star in the political sky was lost to sight.

In the cartoons of a London Weekly Journal

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was a picture in two parts, one representing Randolph Churchill in Africa reclining on a rock, the other Arthur Balfour in the Commons standing in the place of Leadership, indeed the rise of the one to fame and popularity was quite as rapid as that of the other. When at the beginning of the session of 1887 Balfour was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland somewhat to the surprise of his Party, he was but little known to politics, having just held Office in the Local Government Board and nothing more. By the end of that very Session he had become famous and was greeted with hearty applause whenever he appeared. This amazing progress arose not only from his conduct in the House, his readiness in reply and retort, his steadiness in standing up against a tremendous opposition from the Irish benches, and his mastery of details in dealing with the keenest controversy. But it was due, however, mainly to his management of affairs in Ireland itself, to his firmness in repressing disorder, to his capacity for inspiring the welldoers and the

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well-disposed with confidence in the certainty of law and order. Added to this he acquired by charm of manner and personal qualities a popularity the like of which has hardly been seen in this generation. With his tall wiry stature, his polish like that of steel, his rapier-like thrusts he was ever a conspicuous figure in the House. His reputation, which had thus literally flown to a commanding height, soared in the same direction higher and higher. Session after session, till the autumn of 1891 on the death of Mr. W. H. Smith he was appointed First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House, with the unanimous acclamation of his Party, who wished him to champion their cause in the General Election which was expected in the next year. In the following Parliament he became leader of the Opposition to Mr. Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill, and the subsequent measures of Lord Rosebery's Ministry, especially the Bill for disestablishing the Church in Wales. His Leadership in these respects shewed the firmness, the skill, the alert-

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ness which might have been expected. But further it was marked by generous considerateness, and by all the courtesy that might be consistent with meeting the exigencies as they arose. After that in the present Parliament elected in 1895, he reverted to the Leadership of the House, which does not properly fall under contemporary criticism as it is happily by no means concluded.

Since the combination of the Conservative and Liberal Unionist Parties under one Administration the guidance of the policy of the joint party in the Commons has partly fallen into the hands of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, who, in potency and forcefulness, is one of the foremost politicians of the age, both inside and outside Parliament. His speeches on public platforms, closely reasoned, nervous and sinewy, eagerly looked for, eloquent at the right moments, abounding in originality, leaving a deep impression on the national mind—are too well known to need mention here. Suffice it to say that all these grand qualities are displayed

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by him in the Commons, where he produces just the same effect as that which is seen outside in public. But to them there is something added in the House, and these deserve mention. He never strikes unless he has been already assailed—but if attacked, he will hit back again with a force that no other hitter can emulate. He studies the subject in hand with a completeness that fills his quiver with arrows, one or other of which he can shoot off instantaneously. Thus his repartee and retort are scathing and often terrific. It happened that he was habitually attacked by the Gladstonions and by the Irish Party. Against each of these he used to level his shafts, returning shot for shot. While thus engaged, he presented as fine a fighting figure as could be imagined, quite an athlete in intellectual exercise. His speeches filled the House and emptied the Lobbies, being considered some of the most important that could be delivered in Parliament. If he may be surpassed in this or that respect by other orators, he is more free from defects than any-

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one else ; and take him all round all in all, he is the best speaker of the day.

The Leadership of the Liberal Party, which has formally devolved on Sir William Harcourt, did in part pertain to him during the later years of Mr. Gladstone's career. He acted as second in command during several Sessions when the Old Chief, borne down by herculean labours, needed relief from the ordinary cares of the Front Bench, and attended only at times when his presence was indispensable. From his prowess as a hard hitting debater he was called in English "the bruiser" and in Latin the *Sicarius*. His humour was telling rather than light—and none knew better than he how to elicit the cheers of the followers who sat behind him. A towering and massive stature added to the effect of his delivery. He was Chancellor of the Exchequer in Mr. Gladstone's last Ministry, and retained that office in the succeeding Ministry under Lord Rosebery. He then signalized himself by proposing and carrying the revision and extension of the



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Death Duties, which settled once for all many vexed questions that had perplexed Liberal policy during several Parliaments. Whatever be the merits or demerits of that measure, it will remain as one of the monuments of his life's work. While carrying it in the teeth of a strenuous and well-directed Opposition, he evinced much power of statesmanlike management.

William Henry Smith afforded an extraordinary instance,—perhaps unprecedented,—of a man with modest and unpretending demeanour, attaining and keeping the very first position in the House. He was wont to say that speech-making was not in his line—though in fact he used to make effective speeches on platforms outside. He did not attempt to shine in debate. In the House, when a Minister, he was singularly adroit in parrying Questions. With immense business capacity, he led the House well for several years in times of difficulty.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE IRISH NATIONALIST PARTY

The Irish Members to whom this article will refer are the Nationalists—it is to them only that any peculiarity belongs—for the other Irish Members are like the rest of their British brethren.

The Irish Nationalist Party entered Parliament by the General Election of 1885, in imposing numbers, over eighty strong, with the sole and single aim of carrying a Home Rule measure. They were not sure whether they would obtain this concession from one of the great Parties in Britain or the other—they rather hoped to win it from both together. They would subordinate all their political

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conduct and proceedings to this object alone—whatever measure of any other kind they supported or obstructed or opposed, their course would be guided by the effect thereof on the prospects of Home Rule. For some reasons of their own, they were disposed to embarrass British policy and the British Parliament. They reckoned that such embarrassment might be made subservient to Home Rule, might induce Britain to grant such a measure in order to be freed from the vexatious trouble. They even went so far as to cause trouble and even disturbance in order to lower the repute and injure the traditions of the House of Commons, to cause the occurrence of awkward scenes almost daily, till the worry and annoyance should become intolerable. They expected that in despair the British would yield at last in order to be rid of the plague. This view of theirs was not openly expressed, perhaps, but its prevalence was clearly discernible by those who had to watch the Party action from day to day. In this policy

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they united, with full party discipline, under the leadership of Mr. Parnell. If they meant to carry or oppose this or that their expression would be: "we shall send for the boys to vote." A very few belonged to the gentry class; many were men of very moderate means, many were supposed to have but scanty resources. They were believed to be sustained in Parliament by resources largely drawn from sympathizers in America. Nothing, however, was exactly known about this, nor had anyone any business to enquire; they had a right to pursue this system if they chose. Apparently, however this plan, so far as it may have existed, would affect the certainty of their corporate action, for it seemed to be at times a question whether they could be maintained in London at such expense up to such and such a date, or whether it was worth while to bring them back from Ireland, at much expense again, for such and such a crisis.

They sat on the benches on the left side of the House below the gangway; about one

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quarter of the accommodation of the House; they had occupied this quarter in former Parliaments whichever British Party was in power, meaning thereby to indicate that they were always on the Opposition side, being opposed to the Ministry of the day whether Liberal or Conservative, and forming a Party of themselves for the special Irish interests, which they represented, as quite apart from the other interests of the British nation. Their occupation of this quarter in former Parliaments had never been very strong. But now, with numbers more than doubled, their occupation was effective, giving room to none other except a few sympathetic Radicals who sat on the bench nearest the floor of the House. From the first on entering the House after the General Election of 1885, they were vociferous, demonstrative, self-asserting, as if they were a triumphant band who had scaled the Parliamentary citadel. Many were new to Parliament, and had to learn its ways; they were held under strict discipline by their leader.

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Several again were already known as speakers or orators either in the House or in Ireland. The principal orator was Mr. Sexton, whose speeches commanded admiration both for diction and delivery—except that they were too long drawn out; Mr. Timothy Healy was their Rupert of debate: his performances were quite trenchant, and his wit flashed like lurid light; from the fierceness of his language he was sometimes called by his compatriots “Tiger Tim.” Mr. T. P. O’Connor was much listened to as being the lieutenant of Mr. Parnell in the English (not Irish) Elections: he had a merry, rollicking style, like that which we had attributed to the great O’Connell in his humorous moods. Mr. John Redmond we did not hear at first, but when he appeared on the scene later he was found to be the strongest, weightiest, and most formidable orator on the Irish side: Mr. Justin Macarthy was their literary light, his speeches were cultured, softly delivered, and mellifluous. The men in the rank and file spoke boisterously but fluently, and soon learnt the art of talking

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interminably when any obstructive purpose was in view.

Mr. Parnell stood apart from them all; though his moral authority suffered from the first owing to his personal isolation, still the shadow of his great name as “the uncrowned king” of Ireland, spread awe over his followers; but we always supposed its foundation to be insecure, as indeed proved afterwards to be the case. This insecurity arose from his personal isolation. Considering the unruly team he had to manage, with the reins in his skilled hands; he was doubtless obliged to avoid familiarity. But he carried this view too far for success as a leader in a Party where men can be led but cannot be driven. It seemed to us that he rarely or never conversed with the rank and file of his men. We understood that his private address was seldom known even to his Party lieutenants. He certainly received the bulk of his correspondence at the post office in the Lobby of the Commons; that was evident; we heard that he had no other postal address.



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How far this strangeness went, none of us could say; but to some extent it manifestly existed, and so far it gave rise to ominous rumours. It afterwards developed itself in a wondrous manner as will presently be seen.

The first half of 1886 was the culminating point of his career. He had entered a new Parliament at the head of a compact, disciplined, an homogeneous Party, strong enough to turn the scale and rule the balance as between the two great Parties of Britain. His health had not, to all appearances, begun to fail. As he stood up in his place to speak, amid the upturned looks of those seated around him, he was one of the handsomest men in the House. His delivery was at first winning, even conciliatory and his matter simple. It was not till he approached the pith of his case, that his manner stiffened, his face lighted up, and his voice trembled with a suppressed passion worthy of a tragic dramatist. His climax was at the very close of the Home Rule debate as already mentioned in June, 1886. After that he never

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made any long sustained speech in the Commons. In the next speech made by him in the autumn of that very year, on a proposed Land Bill, he halted and fumbled, and losing his thread had often to be prompted by his henchmen. In a subsequent year when the Special Commission of inquiry into the authenticity of certain letters and other grave charges was being instituted, he made several short speeches fraught with menacing fierceness, and certainly his aspect in those moments was meet for a painter of tragedy. The result of that commission seemed to rehabilitate him in the eyes of Mr. Gladstone and of the Gladstonians, but to lower his influence and weight in the House. His health too was believed to be failing. Then he became vitally concerned in that miserable "*cause celebre*" which obliged Mr. Gladstone and the Gladstonians to part company with him.

This case immediately brought about that split in the Irish Nationalist Party which to this day is known as the division between the

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Parnellites and the Anti-Parnellites. The latter indeed have in recent years had further subdivisions among themselves, and we know not exactly how they should be named. But up to the present Parliament the Parnellites under Mr. John Redmond proudly preserved their appellation. How far they display this nomenclature in the present Parliament may be doubtful; but they doubtless retain it in their hearts, and will doubtless place it in the front and van of battle, if, at the next General Election, the Home Rule cause should seem likely to have any chance of success. This conduct of theirs is a veritable tribute to Parnell's memory, and British people would do well to understand its significance. It means that Parnell was "thorough," keeping the Irish Nationalists aloof from all British parties, aiming ceaselessly at the national independence of Ireland, and using for this purpose alone their position in the Parliament of Westminster.

When, on the occasion above mentioned, Parnell's leadership was directly challenged by

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the Anti-Parnellites, the whole Party met in one of the Committee rooms upstairs. That room was the scene of contentions for many days; which were not witnessed indeed, but were heard of by us, inasmuch as the cheers and roars from Irish throats used to resound through the solid doors and re-echo all down the long corridors. As Parnell was still chairman, he guided the deliberations raised by those who were resolved to depose him from the chairmanship. They were in a clear majority, whereas his faithful band of Parnellites formed a minority only. The Anti-Parnellites had been originally instructed by him in the art of obstruction, they now found this peculiar science turned against themselves by the master himself! For nearly a fortnight they strove to get him out of the chair, but there he sat tight in it, proof against all machinations, and showing a stubborn front like a lion at bay. At length they held a separate meeting of their own in another room, and elected Mr. Justin Macarthy as chairman. He at once entered

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the House, and sitting in the seat of Parnell, gave notice of a motion amid the marked cheers of his supporters. Parnell indeed soon reappeared and sat almost alongside of the new leader who had superseded him. For a while it looked as if there would be two kings in the Hibernian Brentford—but the duality was fatal to Parnell's position. Soon the legal meshes of the social case surrounded him, and afterwards his life ebbed away towards an untimely death. The most earnest of the Home Rulers unfailingly cherish his memory, in forgetfulness of his social conduct and in remembrance of what they hold to be his political virtues. The light in which the British parliamentarians regard his career is so well known that I need not mention it.

The Parnellites have subsequently alleged that the Anti-Parnellites ally themselves with a great party in Britain to whose policy the purely Irish objects are to be subordinate or at least deferred. To this very marked and often repeated allegation the Anti-Parnellites, by

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whatever name or names they now call themselves, would naturally have their own reply into which I need not enter.

The speciality of all the Irish Nationalists has been their power of Obstruction. The way in which Obstruction has been—unintentionally perhaps but still effectually misrepresented by each and every Party in Politics from its own standpoint,—has been already explained. The Irish had undoubtedly a right to use it for their own policy, or for the prevention of any policy to which they were opposed. As already explained it is doubtful whether they used it with more severity than that which the British Parties have adopted for stopping what they detested or for saving what they loved. Sometimes the Irish were ruled authoritatively to have pushed Obstruction beyond the utmost allowable limit. On countless occasions they exercised it in a manner grievous and distressing to us who were the sufferers. It was often carried out avowedly with the intention of wearing the Tories out. Naturally the Tories

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would reply that "last,"—meaning endurance—was a Tory quality, and that they would be the willing victims of any suffering in order to carry their points. The "dreary drip of dilatory discussion"—in the phrase of a great Statesman—the midnight vigils—the fresh objections starting just at dawn or sunrise after an all night sitting—especially towards the end of a Session when every delay opened up a vista of political danger—will never be forgotten by the sufferers in body and mind from this drastic treatment. Still the sufferers felt that the Irish Party had a perfect right to do all this; but they knew that the day would come when these very tactics would be used against that Party. When that day actually came, and the Irish found themselves bound and fettered by an Opposition which included obstruction among other elements, it was very amusing to hear them vainly complaining, in convenient oblivion of what they had themselves done in that very line.

Meanwhile the Irish, notwithstanding the

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complaints made by many at the time, advocated their general cause and pressed their particular cases with a tenacity, a persistency, an assiduity, a mastery of local details, which must have delighted their constituents and which extorted the admiration even of their parliamentary opponents. They were ever ready to adopt any tone that might further the emergent purpose which was invariably to wring something from the British Government. To obtain concessions for Ireland was their *raison d'être*; to yield such concessions (in their own words) was in their view among the first of Britain's duties. To this end they would menace or cajole, threaten or withdraw, press forward or hold back, would adopt the most contrary courses within the shortest intervals according to requirements. In reference to any such requirement they evinced accuracy of discrimination, and discernment with presence of mind.

Whether the criminal occurrences and the tragedies which disfigured the annals of Ireland,



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were in any sense justifiable morally in reference to political causes, or whether the Irish Nationalists Members were directly or indirectly connected with these events—are questions not to be discussed here; indeed such things were outside the House. But the alleged character of these proceedings and the responsibility of the Members for them, were matters frequently brought before the House itself during the debates. Such critical discussions, too, related not only to crimes of a heinous description, but also to practices held to be constructively criminal, known by familiar names such as “boycotting,” “exclusive dealing” “plan of campaign,” —and so forth. Inflammatory speeches, inciting to mischief or even worse than that, were attributed to some of the Irish Members, and copious extract reports in the newspapers of such utterances were produced. In such assaults two Members were prominent, Colonel Sanderson and Mr. T. W. Russell. The mission of Colonel Sanderson was to expose what he deemed to be criminal or treasonable

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conspiracies in which he alleged some of the Irish Members to have a share. He pointed these severe charges with a humorous sarcasm, which convulsed his own side with a laughter in which even the Irish could scarce refrain from sharing—though the rising merriment was quickly hushed by the severity of the accusations. Mr. T. W. Russell was equally incisive by his proofs which often came home with such unerring aim that they were called “search lights.” Then he would strike redoubled blows in such a swinging slashing style that the method was named “the tomahawk.” The effect of all this upon the Irish would be indeed tremendous. They seemed about to burst into explosion and yet to restrain themselves, feeling the gravity of the situation. Considerations of Order had to be balanced by the Speaker against that freedom of speech in debate which the Commons have always claimed for themselves. Very often he acted with great success as peacemaker. But such scathing accusations frequently produced scenes in which individual

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Nationalists not unnaturally forgot themselves in their passion, and suspension from service in the House, or temporary expulsion, was unavoidably resorted to.

More guarded, but almost as fatal, would sometimes be the rejoinders and repartees of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, who apparently kept a choice assortment of quotations from speeches made by Irish Members outside the House, from which quiver he would draw arrows for his warfare with them in parliamentary debate.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE LORDS AS SEEN BY THE COMMONS

It would be out of place to attempt any description of the House of Lords as one of the Estates of the realm, of its functions or of its precedure. The Commons as the first Chamber, conscious of their own power, assume an attitude of proud deference towards the Lords. They accept the title of the Lower House and accord that of the Upper House to the Second Chamber. But the Commons do in course of affairs see much of the Lords, and also the Lords see something of the Commons. There is a general courtesy preserved between the two Houses. They have access to each other's Lobbies. The Lords have their own gallery in the House of

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Commons and the Commons theirs in the House of Lords—and both galleries are occupied on occasions of debate or political crisis. The Commons have an additional advantage and facility in the House of Lords which has a Bar of importance. This Bar, which is actually a small space fenced round with metal railing, will in the forenoons be fitted up for the Barristers who plead before the House in its judicial capacity—the Lord Chancellor's seat being moved down near the Bar, and the Law Lords sitting on the benches close by. In the afternoons when the Lords sit in their legislative and executive capacity, the Bar will be cleared for the reception of any Members of the Commons who choose to stand there and listen to their Lordship's debates or proceedings.

Let us consider then what a Commoner thus standing would see. He would look into what is justly called "the Gilded Chamber," in resplendent contrast to the comparative plainness of his own Chamber—the

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noble windows resplendent with coloured glass, the roof beams and rafters gorgeously decorated. Whereas in the Lower House the climax is the Speaker's Chair with the Table immediately underneath it—the climax here is the Royal Throne in which the Sovereign alone may sit. From it descend the steps to the Floor, and at the foot of these a small space is railed off, consequently the Table has to be in the midst of the Floor where sit the Clerks who are Ministers of the House. Near this is placed the seat for the Lord Chancellor as the President of the House. Thus there is here but little of the historic Floor well known in the Lower House. That slight space is further reduced by "the cross benches," so called because they are placed transversely between the rows of benches running laterally on each side of the Chair right and left. This cross-bench arrangement is strange to Commoner eyes. It is meant for Peers who do not range themselves on either side, Ministerial or Opposition, or who do not acknowledge

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allegiance to either Party. Such an arrangement would not suit a representative and elected House, where almost every member must before his election have declared for some side or for some party, the return of an entirely Independent Member being nearly if not quite unknown. The arrangement of the galleries at the ends and the sides differs from that of the Lower House. There is no gallery over the Throne, so that end is vacant; the galleries at the other end are appropriated to strangers the same as in the Lower House; but herein the Newspaper reporters are included and their accommodation is somewhat restricted—whereas in the Lower House the reporters have the largest gallery all to themselves. Apparently it has been held that, in the Lower or popular House, the reporting is a more important function than in the Upper House. The side galleries are set apart for the Peeresses and for other ladies nearly related to Peers—whereas in the Lower House the corresponding Galleries are re-



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served for the Members. The Galleries for the Peeresses are quite open; the ladies are perfectly seen, and on important occasions their appearance in full brilliancy introduces an element of beauty into the scene. There never has been apprehension of the conduct in the Upper House being influenced by the open display of this interesting element. This is diametrically different from the arrangement in the Lower House as already explained. Although the number of the Upper House is smaller, its chamber is wider and longer, so its sitting accommodation is more considerable than that of the Lower House where the number is larger. There can hardly ever be in the Upper House the crush of Members and the difficulty of obtaining seats which may be often felt by the Members of the Lower. On the other hand the side Lobbies are much inferior to those of the Commons; they might indeed be described as poor. In the Commons the Divisions are of the highest moment so the Division Lobbies must

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be commodions. This consideration applies with much less force to the Peers. But the Peers have a very fine room behind the Throne—which perhaps compensates them for the want of any spacious Lobby or Ante-room. As already explained, the Ante-room or outer Lobby in the Commons is very fine. In the Upper House the Library is fine indeed, but by no means equal to that of the Commons; and the Dining rooms are much less considerable, because the Peers as a rule do not sit as late as the dinner hour, and when the sitting is protracted, the Peers can go home to dine and return in time for the division, which will usually be arranged for some definite hour.

Thus in all the structural arrangements there is a difference, almost amounting to contrast, between the two Houses, suitable to the distinctive constitution and functions of each House, and to the habits relating therefrom.

There is one straight line running through the Chamber of the Commons, their outer lobby, their corridor, the Central Hall, the

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corridor towards the Lords and the Upper Chamber—so that if all the doors were open, and all spaces cleared, the Lord Chancellor at his Table in the Lords, could see the Speaker on the Chair in the Commons.

It has been already mentioned that an ordinary Member of the Commons, may stand at the Bar of the Lords and listen to the Debates, and many avail themselves of this right, in order to see how the Bills which have just passed their House are faring in the Lords. Those Members who are also Privy Councillors, have the privilege of standing on the steps at the foot of the Throne, whereby they see and hear extremely well, and are quite close to the Peers—other Privy Councillors not in the Commons have the same privilege; so have the younger sons of Peers. While great Debates are proceeding, these steps are crowded with many of the most eminent Commoners, and their presence lends additional effect to the historic scene.

But it is not only as listeners that the

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Commoners stand at the Bar, when all is quiet and the space is comparatively empty. They are from time to time summoned to the Bar with the Speaker at their head, to hear the Royal assent given in old Norman French to the Bills that have passed both Houses. Then the space of the Bar is well filled. The Assent is seldom or never declared by the Sovereign in person; but by Royal Commissioners, selected Peers sitting in their red robes at the Foot of the Throne. The spectacle is formal and curious,—the long rows of red benches, and the Peeresses galleries, will be empty—from the Table the Clerk reads the Royal Commission, and each Commissioner raises his cap as his name is pronounced. The Clerk reads the titles of the Bills that have been assented to, and after each Bill, another Clerk turning towards the Commons at the Bar, pronounces in Norman French, the words “*La Reine le veult.*” As these words are uttered, the Bill becomes law as is an Act. If the Bill be the financial one, then the Norman French

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is uttered for the words, the Queen thanks her good subjects for their benevolence—namely the grant of money supplies.

But further, the Speaker and the Commons are summoned at the beginning of each Session, to hear the Queen's speech read, either by the Sovereign from the Throne which is rarely the case, or by the Lord Chancellor in the manner just explained. On that occasion the red benches will be fairly well filled, so will the Peeresses Galleries; if the Queen herself be present, then they will be all thronged, and every available corner will be crowded; still the House will be wearing an orderly and dignified aspect. To crown it all, the Commons are to arrive at the Bar—and if the Parliament be a new one, then their Speaker is to demand for them all, their ancient privileges and freedom of speech. At this moment the spectacle ceases to be dignified. The Speaker and the first row of Members behind him may preserve their orderly array, but behind them will be a crush of Members jammed into a

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narrow space, hustling and pushing each other, the force from behind augmenting the confusion, and giving a schoolboy appearance to the scene. All this must seem ridiculous to the spectators from the red benches and from the galleries, yet these are the Commons of Britain coming, not of their own motion, but summoned by the Black Rod to attend at the Bar, it may be in the Royal presence. The absurdity of the thronging arises not from any fault on the part of the Commons, but because the space at the Bar is quite insufficient. Certainly the Commons, a most potent Estate in the realm, should not submit to this arrangement, and should insist on proper accommodation being provided for them on these public occasions.

Having thus sketched the structural arrangements of the Lords in contrast with those of the Commons—I proceed to describe the aspect of the Upper House itself as it used to appear to Commoner eyes.

The aspect of the Commons at certain times on almost every day, will be eager, hushed,

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expectant, even ardent, as if their political fate hung on the issue, as indeed would often be the case, seeing that they must bear in mind their friends, supporters and constituents outside. At similar times in the Lords, the aspect will be firm perhaps, but still severe and subdued, neither of the two sides hindering the other, and the individual Members being all free from any anxiety regarding support or opposition anywhere. Each Peer may feel himself answerable to the nation in the abstract, but not to any person or set of persons. Thus he is able to contemplate the situation with an equanimity rarely known to Commoners. This consideration markedly affects the general aspect of the Upper House.

Under the influence of political excitement, there is constant temptation tending to breaches of order in the Commons, but hardly at all in the Lords. In the Commons the authority of the Speaker is ever displayed, his 'rulings' ring in the ears of the Members, the provision for the enforcement of parliamentary discipline are

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in the mind of every one, and the necessity for all this is universally recognised. The Speaker too, as Jupiter, sits up aloft, and takes no part in the Debates. As one Member sits down after speaking, several Members rise to speak, it is for the Speaker to select from among them, by calling on the one who is to continue the speaking. But in the Lords there is little or nothing of this discipline, by rule or order—so far at least as a spectator can perceive. The Lord Chancellor is in the chair—but apparently without much of disciplinary authority—more like a “*primus inter pares*.” The Peers seem to preserve order among themselves, and by some mutual understanding or by some previous arrangements, they settle who shall speak on both sides, and in what order. Peers seldom or never seem to rise in competition with one another, and the Lord Chancellor does not have to call upon any one, by selection, to speak. The difference between the two Houses in these respects is quite intelligible, in reference to the representative



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character of the Commons, and the hereditary conditions of the Peers.

In the Upper House a Peer seems to have no difficulty at all in introducing a motion whereby his views are brought practically before the public, together with the response which he is sure to elicit from the Front Bench. He has too every reasonable facility for introducing a Bill at any time and for prosecuting it to a Second Reading within a short time. An active minded and justly ambitious Peer has manifestly great advantage over a similar person in the Commons. Indeed, *sua si bona norit*, he would rejoice in his freedom in these respects from anxiety and vexation which beset his brethren in the Commons. In general Legislation the procedure regarding Bills in the first and second reading the stages of Committee and Report, the third reading are the same in both Houses.

During a real Debate—which however does not occur every day or even every week—the conduct of the Lords, the interruptions and the

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cheering will be much the same as in the Commons, but milder and more restrained all round—except that when hearty approval is won by a speaker, the cheers of the Lords at the conclusion are almost as hearty and resounding as those of the Commons. The oratory is much the same in high quality with the best speakers in both the Upper and the Lower House, or if there be any appreciable difference it is purely a matter of opinion. The average of speaking is probably better in the Lords than in the Commons, probably because it is carried on amidst quieter surroundings allowing more concentration of thought, and causing fewer distractions to impede the flow of ideas and of diction. Often too a Commoner has to speak after long fatigue and watching, with spirit weakened by disappointment at not having been earlier called to take part in the debate. Instead of that, a Peer would usually come up fresh to speak.

The labours of a Peer in his House, are very much less than those of a Commoner. On

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many afternoons in the beginning of the Session the House assembles in the afternoon and rises within an hour or so. It is towards the end of the Session that the sittings become longer when important Bills come up from the Commons. The Committee work must be somewhat the same for Members of both Houses—except that it is perhaps lighter in the Lords, where the Select Committee would be fewer. The Private Bills as previously described have to pass the Committees of both Houses.

The Address to the Crown in response to the Speech from the Throne is moved and seconded by Peers in uniform, then adverted to by the Leaders of the two Front Benches, after the same manner as in the Commons—except that the consequent debate is generally terminated in one evening instead of many evenings which the Commons usually occupy.

Of the principal figures in the Upper House during recent years the most remarkable have been the Earl of Beaconsfield, who afforded an

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instance, perhaps rare, of a celebrated Commoner attaining an equal degree of distinction after being elevated to the Peerage—the Marquess of Salisbury, whose brilliant speeches have been well worth hearing for their own sake apart from their importance as proceeding from the Prime Minister and the Director of Foreign Affairs—Lord Rosebery, whose incisiveness in debate and whose wisdom under the guise of wit have been signalized in the Ministry as well as in Opposition—the Duke of Devonshire, whose utterances have still the same weight which was once wielded with great effect in the Commons—The Duke of Argyll, by common consent one of the loftiest, grandest, and most impressive orators of his time.

The scenes which often come about in the Commons rarely appear in the Lords. There is a certain picturesqueness when new Peers, often famous persons, are introduced in their red robes. When mighty issues like that of Home Rule Bill are depending, the crowded approaches and the thronged galleries do indi-

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cate the excitement of the moment. But after the result of the Division is declared, there will be rarely or never any of the demonstrations which are invariably made in the Commons.

THE END









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